

FICTION

George A Birmingham

Lalage's Lovers

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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LALAGE'S LOVERS

By George A. Birmingham

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CHAPTER I

I had, I suppose, some reason for calling on Canon Beresford, but I have totally forgotten what it was. In all probability my mother sent me to discuss some matter connected with the management of the parish or the maintenance of the fabric of the church. I was then, and still am, a church warden. The office is hereditary in my family. My son--Miss Pettigrew recommended my having several sons--will hold it when I am gone. My mother has always kept me up to the mark in the performance of my duties. Without her at my elbow I should, I am afraid, be inclined to neglect them. I am bored, not interested as a churchwarden should be, when the wall of the graveyard crumbles unexpectedly. I fail to find either pleasure or excitement in appointing a new sexton. Canon Beresford, our rector, is no more enthusiastic about such things than I am. He and I are very good friends, but when he suspects me of paying him a business visit he goes out to fish. There are, I believe, trout in the stream which flows at the bottom of the glebe land, but I never heard of Canon Beresford catching any of them.

It must have been business of some sort which took me to the rectory that afternoon, for Canon Beresford had gone out with his rod. Miss Battersby told me this and added, as a justification of her own agreeable solitude, that Lalage was with her father. Miss Battersby is Lalage's governess, and she would not consider it right to spend the afternoon over a novel unless she felt sure that her pupil was being properly looked after. In this case she was misinformed. Lalage was not with her father. She was perched on one of the highest branches of a horse-chestnut tree. I heard her before I saw her, for the chestnut tree was in full leaf and Lalage had to hail me three or four times before I discovered where she was. I always liked Lalage, and even in those days she had a friendly feeling for me. I doubt, however, whether a simple desire for my conversation would have brought her down from her nest. I might have passed without being hailed if it had not happened that I was riding a new bicycle. In those days bicycles were still rare in the west of Ireland. Mine was a new toy and Lalage had never seen it before. She climbed from her tree top with remarkable agility and swung herself from the lowest branch with such skill and activity that she alighted on her feet close beside the bicycle. She was at that time a little more than fourteen years of age. She asked at once to be allowed to ride the bicycle. I was a young man then, active and vigorous; but I was hot, breathless, and exhausted before Lalage had enough of learning to ride. I doubt whether she would have given in even after an hour's hard work if we had not met with a serious accident. We charged into a strong laurel bush. Lalage's frock was torn. The rent was a long one, extending diagonally from the waistband to the bottom hem. I knew, even while I offered one from the back of my tie, that a pin would be no use.

"Cattersby," said Lalage, "will be mad--raging mad. She's always at me because things will tear my clothes. Horrid nuisance clothes are, aren't they? But Cattersby doesn't think so of course. She likes them."

The lady's name is Battersby, not Cattersby. She held the position of governess to Lalage for more than a year and is therefore entitled to respect. Her predecessor, a Miss Thomas, resigned after six weeks. It was my mother who recommended Miss Battersby to Canon Beresford. I felt that I ought to protest against Lalage's irreverent way of speaking. In mere loyalty to my mother, apart altogether from the respect which, as a landed proprietor, I naturally entertain for all forms of law and order, I was absolutely bound to say something.

"You should speak of her as Miss Battersby," I said firmly.

"I call her Cattersby," said Lalage, "because that is her nature."

I said that I understood what this marker meant; but Lalage, who even then had a remarkable faculty for getting at the naked truth of things, did not even pretend to believe me.

"Come along," she said, "and I'll show you why."

I followed her meekly, leading my bicycle, which, like Lalage's frock, had suffered in its contest with the laurel. We passed through the stable yard and I stopped to put my bicycle into the coach house. An Irish terrier, Lalage's property, barked at me furiously, thinking, I suppose, that I intended to steal Canon Beresford's cart. Lalage chose to regard this as a ridiculous affectation on the part of the dog and shut him up in the stable as a punishment for folly. Then we climbed a stile, paddled round a large manure heap, crossed an ash pit, and came at last to a pigsty. There were no pigs in it, and it was, for a pigsty, very clean. Lalage opened the gate and we entered the small enclosure in which the pigs, if there had been pigs, would have taken food and exercise.

"You'll have to stoop down now and crawl," said Lalage. "You needn't be afraid. The pigs were sold last week."

I realized that I was being invited to enter the actual home, the private sleeping room, of the departed swine. The door of it had been newly painted. While I knelt in front of it I read a notice which stretched across it in large white letters, done, apparently, with chalk:

The Office of the Anti-cat
Editor: Miss Lalage Beresford, B. A.
Sub-Editor: Ditto. Ditto.

Underneath this inscription was a carefully executed drawing of a spear with a large, a disproportionately large, and vicious looking barb. A sort of banner depended from its shaft, with these words on it: "For Use on Cattersby. Revenge is sweet!" I looked round at Lalage, who was on her hands and knees behind me.

I intended asking for some explanation of the extraordinarily vindictive spirit displayed by the spear and the banner. Lalage forestalled my question and explained something else.

"I have the office here," she said, "because it's the only place where I can be quite sure she won't follow me."

This time I understood thoroughly what was said to me. Cattersby--that is to say, Miss Battersby--if she were the sort of person who mourned over torn frocks, and if, as Lalage suggested, she liked clothes, would be very unwilling to follow any one into the recesses of the pigsty. Even a bower in the upper branches of a tree would be less secure from her intrusion. We crawled in. Against the far wall of the chamber stood the trough from which the pigs, now no doubt deceased, used to eat.

"It was put there," said Lalage, who seemed to know that I was thinking of the trough, "after they had done cleaning out the sty, so that it wouldn't go rotten in the wet before we got some more young pigs."

"Was that Miss Battersby's idea?"

"No, it wasn't. Cattersby wouldn't think of anything half so useful. All she cares about is sums and history and lessony things. It was Tom Kitterick who put it there, and I helped him. Tom Kitterick is the boy who cleans the boots and pumps the water. It was that time," she added, "that I got paint all over my blue dress. She said it was Tom Kitterick's fault."

"It may have been," I said, "partly. Anyhow Tom Kitterick is a red-haired, freckly youth. It wouldn't do him any harm to be slanged a bit for something."

"It's a jolly sight better to have freckles, even if you come out all over like a turkey egg, than to go rubbing stinking stuff on your face at night. That's what Cattersby does. I caught her at it."

Miss Battersby has a nice, smooth complexion and is, 'no doubt, quite justified in doing her best to preserve it. But I did not argue the point with Lalage. A discussion might have led to further revelations of intimate details of the lady's toilet. I was young in those days and I rather prided myself on being a gentleman. I changed the subject.

"Perhaps," I said, "you will now tell me why you have brought me here. Are we to have a picnic tea in the pigs' trough?"

Lalage crawled past me. She had to crawl, for there was not room in the sty for even a child to stand upright. She took out of the trough a bundle of papers, pierced at the top left-hand corner and tied with a slightly soiled blue ribbon. She handed it to me and I looked it over. It was, apparently, a manuscript magazine modelled on those sold at railway bookstalls for sixpence. It was called, as I might have guessed, the *Anti-Cat*. The table of contents promised the following reading matter:

1. *Editor's Chat.*
2. *Poetry--A Farewell. To be recited in her presence.*
3. *The Ignominy of Having a Governess.*
4. *Prize Competition for the Best Insult Story.*

"You can enter for that if you like," said Lalage, who had been following my eyes down the page.

"I shall," I said, "if she insults me; but she never has yet."

"Nor she won't," said Lalage. "She'll be honey to you. That's one of the worst things about her. She's a hypocrite. I loathe hypocrites, don't you?"

I returned to the table of contents:

5. *On Sneaking--First Example.*
6. *Our Tactics, by the Editor.*

"She won't insult you," said Lalage. "She simply crawls to any grown-up. You should hear her talking to father and pretending that she thinks fishing nice."

"She's perfectly right to do that. After all, Lalage, your father is a canon and a certain measure of respect is due to his recreations as well as to his serious work. Besides----"

"It's never right to crawl to any one."

"Besides," I said, "what you call crawling may in reality be sympathy. I'm sure Miss Battersby has a sympathetic disposition. It is very difficult to draw the line between proper respect, flavoured with appreciative sympathy, and what you object to as sycophancy."

"If you're going to try and show off," said Lalage, "by using ghastly long words which nobody could possibly understand you'd better go and do it to the Cat. She'll like it. I'm not going to sit here all day listening to you. Either read the magazine or don't, whichever you like. I don't care whether you do or not, but I won't be jawed."

This subdued me at once. I began with the poem:

*"Fair Cattersby I weep to see
You haste away by train,
As yet that Latin exercise
Has not been done again.
Stay, stay,
Until amo, I say.
(To be continued in our next)"*

"There was a difficulty about the last three lines, I suppose," I said.

"Yes," said Lalage. "I couldn't remember how they went, and Cattersby had the book. She pretends she likes reading poetry, though she doesn't really, and she makes me learn off whole chunks of it."

"You can't deny that it comes in useful occasionally. I don't see how you could have composed that parody if she hadn't made you learn----"

"She didn't. That's not the sort of poetry she makes me learn. If it was I might do it. She finds out rotten things about 'Little Lamb, who made you?' 'We are Seven,' and stuff of that sort. Not what I call poetry at all."

I had the good sense while at Oxford to attend some lectures given by the professor of poetry. I also belonged for a time to an association modestly called "The Brotherhood of Rhyme." We used to meet in my rooms and read original compositions to each other until none of us could stand it any longer. I am therefore thoroughly well qualified to discuss poetry with any one.

I should, under ordinary circumstances, have taken a pleasure in defending the reputations of Blake and Wordsworth, but I shrank from attempting to do so in a pigsty with Lalage Beresford as an opponent, I turned to the last page of the *Anti-Cat* and read the article entitled "Our Tactics." It was exceedingly short, but it struck me as able. I began to have a great deal of pity for Miss Battersby.

"Calm" (or Balm. There was an uncertainty about the first letter) "and haughty *in her presence*. Let yourself out *behind her back*."

"What about your going in for the competition?" said Lalage. "Even if she doesn't insult you you could easily invent something. You've seen her and you know quite well the sort she is. You might get the prize."

"May I read the story you've got?" I asked. "If it's not very good I might perhaps try; but it is probably quite superior to anything I could possibly produce, and in that case there would be no use my attempting to compete."

"It is good," said Lalage, "but yours might be good too, and then I should divide the prize, or you could give a second prize; a box of Turkish Delight would do."

This encouraged me and I read the "Insult Story."

"I did my lessons studiously, as good as I could.", Lalage was a remarkably good speller for her age. Many much older people would have staggered over "studiously." She took it, so to speak, in her stride.

"I wrote out a lot of questions on the history and answered them all without looking at the book. I knew it perfectly. The morning came and with it history. I answered all the questions except one--the character of Mary. The insulter repeated it, commanding me to 'Say it now.' I said it with a bland smile upon my face, as I thought how well I knew my history."

"Laiage," I said, pausing in the narrative, "did you make that smile bland simply because you knew your history or was its blandness part of the tactics, 'Balm and haughty in her presence?'"

"Calm," said Lalage, "calm, not balm. Never mind about that. Go on."

"The insulter," I read, "turned crimson with rage and shrieked demnation and stamped about the floor. Cooling down a bit, she said, 'You shall write it out ten times this afternoon.' Naturally I was astonished, for I had said it perfectly correctly when she told me. I had, however, a better control over my temper than she had, and managed, despite my passionate thoughts, to smile blandly all through, though it made her ten times worse."

"Well?" said Lalage when I had finished.

"I am a little confused," I said. "I thought the story was to be about an insult offered by Miss Battersby to some one else, you, or perhaps me." "It is," said Lalage. "That's what the prize is for, the best insult."

"But this seems to me to be about an insult applied by the author to Miss Battersby. I couldn't conscientiously go in for a competition in which I should represent myself as doing a thing of that sort."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Lalage. "I didn't insult her. She insulted me."

"Come now, Lalage, honour bright! That smile of yours! How would you like any one to make you ten times worse

by smiling blandly at you when you happened to be stamping about the floor crimson in the face and shrieking----"

"I wouldn't. I don't use words of that sort even when I'm angry."

"It might be better if you did. A frank outburst of that kind is at times less culpable than a balmy smile. I have a much greater respect and liking for the person who says plainly what she means than----"

"She didn't. She wouldn't think it ladylike." "Didn't what?"

"Didn't say straight out what she meant."

"She can't have meant more," I said. "After all, we must be reasonable. There isn't any more that any one could mean."

"You're very stupid," said Lalage. "I keep on telling you she didn't say it. She's far too great a hypocrite."

"Do you mean to say that she didn't stamp about the floor and say----"

I hesitated. I have been very carefully brought up and I am a churchwarden. Besides, there is a Latin tag which Canon Beresford, who has a taste for tags, quotes occasionally, about the great reverence due to boys. Obviously a much greater reverence must be due to girls. I did not want my conscience to have an opportunity for reproaching me. Therefore I hesitated when it came to the point of saying out loud a word which Lalage ought certainly not to hear.

She came to my rescue and finished my sentence for me in a way which got me out of my difficulty. Very likely she felt that she ought not to corrupt me.

"That word," she said.

"Thanks! We'll put it that way. Am I to understand that she didn't say that word?"

"Certainly not," said Lalage. "She couldn't if she tried. I should--I really think I should quite like her if she did."

I felt that this was as far as I was at all likely to get in bringing Lalage to a better frame of mind. Her attitude toward her governess was very far indeed from that enjoined in the Church Catechism, but I lacked the courage to tell her so. Nor do I think I should have effected much even if I had been as brave in rebuke as an archdeacon or a bishop. Besides, I felt that I had accomplished something. Lalage had committed herself to an approval of a hypothetical Miss Battersby. If a governess could be found in the world who would stamp about the floor and shriek that word, or if Miss Battersby would learn the habit of violent profanity, Lalage would quite like her. It was a definite concession. I had a mental vision of the changed Miss Battersby, a lady freckled from head to foot, magnificently contemptuous of glycerine and cucumber, who hated clothes and tore them when she could, who rejoiced to see blue dresses with blobs of bright red paint on them, who scoffed openly at Blake's poetry, who had been to sea or companied with private soldiers on the battlefield, and so garnered a store of scorching blasphemies. I imagined Lalage taking this paragon to her heart, clinging to her with warm affection, leading her into pigstys for confidential chats, and, if she published a magazine at all, calling it *Our Feline Friend*. But the dream faded, as such dreams do. Miss Battersby was plainly incapable of rising to the heights required.

It is to my credit that in the end I did make an effort to soften Lalage.

"I wish," I said, "that you'd try and call her Pussy instead of Cat."

"Why? What's the difference?"

"The meaning is the same," I said. "But it's a much kinder way of putting it. You ought to try and be kind, Lalage."

She pondered this advice for a while and then said:

"I would, if only she'd stop kissing me."

"Does she do it often?"

"Every morning and every evening and sometimes during the day."

That settled it. I could not press my point. Once, years afterward, Miss Battersby very nearly kissed me, but even before there was any chance of such a thing I was able to sympathize with Lalage. I crept out of the pigsty and went home again, leading my injured bicycle.

CHAPTER II

There is a short cut which leads from my house to the church, and therefore, of course, to the rectory, which stands, as rectories often do, close to the church. The path--it can only be used by those who walk--leads past the garden and through a wood to the high road. It was on this path, a quarter of a mile or so from the road, that I met Canon Beresford, about ten days after my interview with Lalage in the pigsty. Certain wood pigeons of low morality had been attacking our gooseberry bushes. My mother, instigated by the gardener, demanded their destruction, and so I went out with a gun. I shot two of the worst offenders. The gardener discovered half digested fruit in the dead bodies, so I am sure that I got the right birds and did not unjustly execute the innocent. Then I met the Canon. He displayed no interest whatever in the destruction of the wood pigeons, although his garden must have suffered quite as much as ours. I remarked that it was nearly luncheon time and asked him to return with me and share the meal. He was distraught and nervous, but he managed to quote Horace by way of reply:

*"Destructus ensis cui super impia
Cervice pendet, non Siculae dapes. . . ."*

The Canon's fondness for Horace accounts, I suppose, for the name he gave his daughter. His habit of quoting is troublesome to me; because I cannot always translate what he says. But he has a feeling for my infirmity and a tactful way of saving my self-respect.

"If you had a heavy, two-handed sword hanging over your head by a hair," he explained, "you would be thinking about something else besides luncheon."

"What has the Archdeacon been doing?" I asked.

The Archdeacon is a man with a thirst for information about church affairs, and he collects what he wants by means of questions printed on sheets of paper which he expects other people to answer. Canon Beresford, who never has statistics at hand, and consequently has to invent his answers to the questions, suffers a good deal from the Archdeacon.

"It's not the Archdeacon this time," he said. "I wish it was. The fact is I am in trouble again about Lalage. I am on my way up to consult your mother."

"Has Miss Battersby been complaining?"

"She's leaving," said the Canon, at once. "Leaving, so to speak, vigorously."

"I was afraid it would come to that. She wasn't the sort of woman who'd readily take to swearing."

"I very nearly did," said the Canon. "She cried. It's curious, but she really seems fond of Lalage."

"Did she by any chance force her way into the pigsty and find the *Anti-Cat*?"

Canon Beresford looked at me and a smile hovered about his mouth. "So you've seen that production?" he said. "I call it rather good."

"But you can hardly blame Miss Battersby for leaving, can you?"

"She didn't see it," said the Canon, "thank goodness."

"Then why on earth is she leaving? What else can she have to complain of?"

"There was trouble. The sort of trouble nobody could possibly foresee or guard against. You know Tom Kitterick, don't you?"

"The boy who cleans your boots? Yes, I do. A freckly faced brat."

"Exactly. Well, it appears that Miss Battersby is rather particular about her complexion, and----"

"Lalage tried the stuff on Tom Kitterick, I suppose."

"Yes. She used the whole bottle, and Miss Battersby found out what had happened and complained to me. She was extremely nice about it, but she said that the incident had made her position as Lalage's governess quite impossible."

"Lalage, of course, smiled balmily."

"Calmly," said the Canon. "She told me herself that the word was calm, though it looked rather like 'balm.' Anyhow, that was the last straw. Miss Battersby goes next week. The Archdeacon----"

"I thought he'd come in before we'd done."

"He did his best to be sympathetic and helpful. He said yesterday, just before he went to Dublin, that what Lalage requires is a firm hand over her. That's the sort of thing a bachelor with no children of his own does say, and means of course. Any man who had ever tried to bring up a girl would know that firm hands are totally useless, and, besides, I haven't got any. *Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno...*! Don't try to translate that if you'd rather not. It simply means that I'm not the man I used to be. I hate trying to cope with these domestic broils. That's why I'm going up to see your mother."

The drawn sword did not really interfere with the Canon's appetite, but he refused to smoke a cigar after luncheon. I went off by myself to the library. He followed my mother into the drawing-room. I waited, although I had a good many things to do, until he joined me. He sighed heavily as he sat down.

"Lalage is to go to school after summer," he said.

"My mother," I replied with conviction, "is sure to be right about a matter like that."

"I suppose she is; but Lalage won't like it."

The Canon sighed again, heavily. I tried to cheer him up.

"She'll enjoy the companionship of the other girls," I said. "I daresay she won't have a bad time. After all, a girl of fourteen ought to have friends of her own age. It will be far better for her to be running about with a skipping rope in a crowd of other damsels than to be climbing chestnut trees and writing parodies in lonely pigstys."

"That's very much what your mother said. I wish I could think so. I'm dreadfully afraid that, brought up as she has been, she'll have a bad time of it."

"Anyhow, she won't have half, as bad a time as the schoolmistress."

I had hit upon the true line of consolation. The Canon smiled feebly, and I pursued my subject.

"There won't, of course, be pigstys in the school, but----"

"I don't think a pigsty is absolutely essential to Lalage's comfort."

"Probably not. Lalage isn't the sort of girl who is dependent for her happiness on the accident of outward circumstance. You know, Canon, that our surroundings are not the things which really matter most. The philosophic mind----"

I had unthinkingly given the Canon his opportunity. I could see a well-known quotation actually trembling on his lips. I stopped him ruthlessly.

"I know that ode," I said. "It's one I learned at school, but it doesn't apply to Lalage. She isn't in the least content with things as she finds them. That's her great charm. She's more like Milton's Satan."

I can quote too, though only English poets, unless after special preparation beforehand. I intended to shoot off some lines out of "Paradise Lost" at the Canon, but he would not listen. He may not have liked the comparison suggested.

"I have to be off," he said. "Lalage is waiting to hear what your mother has settled. I mustn't keep her too long."

"Did you tell her you were coming up here for advice?"

"Of course I did. She quite agreed with me that it was the best thing to do. She always says that your mother is the only person she knows who has any sense. Miss Battersby's sudden resignation was rather a shock to her. She was in a curiously chastened mood this morning."

"She'll get over that all right," I said. "She'll be bringing out another number of the *Anti-Cat* in a couple of days."

I spent two hours after the Canon left me watching the building of a new lodge at my back gate. My mother professes to believe that work of this kind, indeed of any kind, is better done if I go and look at it. In reality I think she is anxious to provide me with some sort of occupation and to interest me in the management of such property as recent legislation has left to an Irish landlord. But she may be right in supposing that the builders build better when I am watching them. They certainly build less rapidly. The foreman is a pleasant fellow, with a store of interesting anecdotes. I give him tobacco in some form and he narrates his experiences. The other workmen listen and grin appreciatively. Thus a certain sedateness of progress is ensured and all danger of hasty building, which is, I understand, called jerry building, is avoided.

At five o'clock, after I had heard some twenty or thirty stories and the builders had placed in position about the same number of stones, I went home in search of afternoon tea. My mother was in the drawing-room, and Miss Battersby was with her. She too, had come to ask advice. I am sure she needed it, poor woman. What she said about Lalage I do not know, for the subject was dropped when I entered the room, but Miss Battersby's position evidently commanded my mother's sympathy. Shortly after leaving the rectory she was established, on my mother's recommendation, in Thormanby Park. Lord Thormanby, who is my uncle, has three daughters, all of them nice, well-disposed girls, not the least like Lalage. Miss Battersby got on well with them, taught them everything which well-educated girls in their position ought to know. She finally settled down as a sort of private secretary to Lord Thormanby. He needed some one of the sort, for as he grew older he became more and more addicted to public business. He is at present about sixty-five. If he lives to be seventy and goes on as he is going, Miss Battersby will have to retire in favour of some one who can write shorthand and manipulate a typewriter. She will then, I have no doubt, play a blameless part in life by settling flowers for Lady Thormanby. But all this is still a long way off.

I was naturally anxious to hear Miss Battersby's version of the experimental treatment of Tom Kitterick's complexion. I hoped that my mother would have told me the story voluntarily. She did not, so I approached the subject obliquely

after dinner.

"The Archdeacon," I said, "was lamenting to me this morning that Mrs. Beresford died while Lalage was still a baby."

My mother seemed a little surprised to hear this.

"He takes the greatest interest in Lalage," I added. "She's a very attractive little girl."

"Very," said my mother. "But I thought the Archdeacon went to Dublin yesterday. He certainly told me he was going. Did he come back at once?"

"So far as I know he hasn't come back."

"Then when did he say----"

"He didn't actually say it at all. He hardly ever says anything to me. I so seldom see him, you know."

This at least was true. Although the seat of the archdeaconry is in Drumbo, a town which contains our nearest railway station and which is our chief centre for local shopping, I had not spoken to the Archdeacon for more than three months. My mother seemed to be waiting for an explanation of my original remark. I gave her one at once.

"But it's exactly the kind of thing the Archdeacon would have said if he hadn't been in Dublin and if I had met him and if our conversation had happened to turn on Lalage Beresford."

My mother admitted frankly that this was true; but she seemed to think my explanation incomplete. I added to it.

"He went on to speak at some length," I said. "That is to say he would have gone on to speak at some length about the great importance of a mother's influence during the early years of a girl's life."

My mother still looked at me and her face still wore a questioning expression. It was evident to me that I must further justify myself.

"So I'm not doing the Archdeacon any wrong," I went on, "in putting into his mouth words and sentiments which he would certainly approve. I happen to have forestalled him in giving them expression, but he would readily endorse them. You know yourself that he's great on subjects like the sacred home influence of a good woman."

"I suppose," said my mother after a pause, "that you want to hear the whole account of Lalage's latest escapade?"

"Miss Battersby's version of it," I said. "I heard the Canon's after luncheon."

"And that story of yours about the Archdeacon----"

"That," I said, "was my way of introducing the subject without displaying what might strike you as vulgar curiosity. I have too much respect for you to heckle you with aggressive inquiries as if you were a Chief Secretary for Ireland and I were a Member of Parliament. Besides, I don't like the feeling that I'm asking blunt questions about Miss Battersby's private affairs. After all, she's a lady. I'm sure you'll appreciate my feelings."

"Lalage," said my mother, "is an extremely naughty little girl who will be a great deal better at school."

"But have you considered the plan from the point of view of the school you're sending her to?"

"Miss Pettigrew is an old friend of mine and----"

"Is she the schoolmistress?"

"The principal," said my mother, "and she's quite capable of dealing with Lalage."

"I wasn't thinking of her. As I told the Canon this afternoon, Lalage will probably be very good for her."

"She'll certainly be very good for Lalage."

"I'm not saying anything the least derogatory to Miss Pettigrew. Schoolmasters are just the same. So are the heads of colleges. The position tends to develop certain quite trifling defects of character for which Lalage will be an almost certain cure."

"You don't know Miss Pettigrew."

"No, I don't. That's the reason I'm trying not to talk of her. What I'm considering and what you ought to be considering is the effect of Lalage on the other girls. Think of those nice, innocent young creatures, fresh from their sheltered homes----"

"My dear boy," said my mother, "what on earth do you know about little girls?"

"Nothing," I said, "but I've always been led to believe that they are sweet and innocent."

"Let me tell you then," said my mother, "that Lalage has a career of real usefulness before her in that school. Most girls of her age are inclined to be sentimental and occasionally priggish. Lalage will do them all the good in the world."

I wonder why it is that so many able women have an incurably low opinion of their own sex? My mother would not say things like that about schoolboys, though they are at least equally sentimental and most of them more priggish. She is extremely kind to people like Miss Battersby, although she regards them as pitifully incompetent when their cosmetics are used on stable-boys. Yet she would not despise me or regard it as my fault if some one took my shaving

soap and washed a kitchen maid's face with it.

"So," I said, "Lalage is to go forth as a missionary of anarchy, a ravening wolf into the midst of a sheepfold."

"The Archdeacon was saying to me this morning," said my mother, "that if you----"

"May I interrupt you one moment?" I said. "I understood that the Archdeacon was in Dublin."

"This," said my mother, "is another of the things which the Archdeacon would have said if he had been at home."

"Oh," I said, "in that case I should particularly like to hear it."

"He said, or would have said, that if you allow your habit of flippant talking to grow on you you'll lose all hold on the solemn realities of life and become a totally useless member of society."

"I quite admit," I said, "that the Archdeacon would have put it in pretty nearly those words if he had said it. I particularly admire that part about the solemn realities of life. But the Archdeacon's a just man and he would not have made a remark of that kind. He knows the facts. I hold a commission in the militia, which is one of the armed forces of the Crown; auxiliary is, I think, the word properly applied to it. I am a justice of the peace and every Wednesday I sit on the judgment seat in Drumbo and agree with the stipendiary magistrate in administering justice. I am also a churchwarden and the Archdeacon is well aware of what that means. He would be the first to admit that these are solemn realities. I don't see what more I can do, unless I stand for Parliament. I suppose a constituency might be found somewhere which would value a man with a good temper and a little money to spare."

"Perhaps," said my mother smiling, "we'll find that constituency for you some day."

This was the first hint I ever got of my unfortunate destiny. It gave me a feeling of chill. There is nothing I want less than a seat in Parliament; but nothing seems more certain now than that I shall get one. Even then, when my mother made her first smiling reference to the subject, I knew in my heart that there was no escape for me.

CHAPTER III

Lalage's departure from our midst took place early in September and happened on a Wednesday, the day of the Drumbo Petty Sessions. Our list of malefactors that week was a particularly short one and I was able to leave the court house in good time to see Lalage off at the railway station. I was in fact, in very good time and arrived half an hour before the train was advertised to leave. Canon Beresford and Lalage were there before me. The Canon, when I came upon them, was pressing Lalage to help herself to chocolate creams from a large box which he held open in his hand. He greeted me with an apologetic quotation:

*"Nunc vino peillite curas
Cras ingens iterabimus sequor."*

"When you come home for the Christmas holidays, Lalage," I said, "you'll be able to translate that. In the meanwhile I may as well tell you that it means----"

"You needn't," said Lalage. "Father has told me four times already. He has been saying it over and over ever since breakfast. It means that I may as well eat as much as I can now because I shall be sick to-morrow any way. But that's all humbug, of course. I shouldn't be sick if I ate the whole box. Last Christmas I ate three boxes as well as plum pudding."

I felt snubbed. So, I think, did the Canon. Lalage smiled at us, but more in pity than in balm.

"I call this rather a scoop for me," said Lalage.

"I'm glad of that," I said, "for I've brought a bottle of French plums from my mother and a box of Turkish Delight which I bought out of my own money."

"Thanks," said Lalage. "But it wasn't the chocolates I was thinking of. The scoop I mean is going to school. It's a jolly sight better than rotting about here with a beastly governess."

"You can't expect any governess to enjoy being robbed of her glycerine and cucumber," I said. "You wouldn't like it yourself."

"That wasn't the real reason," said Lalage. "Even Cattersby had more sense than that."

"She means," said the Canon, "that it didn't begin there."

"No," I said, "it began with the character of Mary."

"It didn't," said Lalage. "She'd forgotten all about that and so had I. What really began it was my birthday. For three weeks I had suggested a holiday for that day from the tyrant. Her answer had ever been: 'A half will do you nicely.' If pressed: 'You are very ungrateful. I may not give you even that.' So I acted boldly. It was breakfast time and we were eating fish----"

"Trout," said the Canon. "I remember the morning perfectly. Tom Kitterick caught them the day before. I took him out with me. The Archdeacon had been over to see me."

"Laying down my fork," Lalage went on, "I said to no one in particular----"

"Excuse me, Lalage," I said, "but is this a quotation from the last number of the *Anti-Cat*?"

"It is. I had an article about it. How did you guess?"

"There was something in the style of the narrative, a certain quite appreciable literary flavour which suggested the *Anti-Cat*; but please go on and keep to the words of the article as far as possible. You had just got to where you spoke to no one in particular."

"Laying down my fork, I said to no one in particular: 'Of course I get a holiday for my birthday.' 'I think a half----' began she. 'Of course,' said father loudly, 'a holiday on such a great occasion.' Her face fell. Her scowl deepened. To hide her rage she blew her nose. There was a revengeful glitter in her eye."

Lalage paused.

"I need scarcely tell you," said the Canon, "that I had no idea when I spoke that there had been any previous discussion of the subject."

"The article ends there, I suppose," I said.

"Yes," said Lalage. "She had it in for me after that worse than ever, knowing that I had jolly well scored off her."

"And in the end she broke out over your effort to improve Tom Kitterick's complexion?"

"She sneaked," said Lalage; "sneaked to father. I wrote an article about that. It's in my box if you'd like to see it."

The Canon's eyes met mine. Then we both looked at our watches. We had still ten minutes before the train started.

"It's about halfway down," said Lalage, "on the left-hand side."

"I think we might----" I said.

"Yes," said the Canon. "In fact we must."

We moved together across the platform toward the porter's barrow, on which Lalage's trunk lay.

"I should like to see the article," I said, fumbling with the strap.

"It isn't so much that," said the Canon. "Somebody is sure to unpack her box for her to-night, and if Miss Pettigrew came on the thing and read it----"

"She would be prejudiced against Lalage."

"I'd like the poor child to start fair, anyhow," said the Canon, "whatever happens later on."

We unpacked a good many of Lalage's clothes and came on the second number of the *Anti-Cat*. Lalage took possession of it and turned over the pages, while the Canon and I refolded a blue serge dress and wedged it into its place with boots.

"Here you are," said Lalage, when I had finished tugging at the straps. "Sneaking, Second Example. The Latest Move of Cattersby. Such a move! A disgrace to any properly run society, a further disgrace to the already disgraceful tactics of the Cat! How even that base enemy could do such a thing is more than we honourable citizens can understand."

"The other honourable citizen," I said, "is Tom Kitterick, I suppose."

"No," said Lalage. "There was only me, but that's the way editors always talk. Father told me so once.--'Yet she did it. She sneaked. Yes, sneaked to the grown-up society, complained, as the now extinct Tommy used to do.'"

"The allusion," I said, "escapes me. Who was the now extinct Tommy?"

"The one before the Cat," said Lalage.

"Her name," said the Canon feebly, "was Miss Thomas. She did complain a good deal about Lalage during the six weeks she was with us."

"Is that the whole of the article?" I asked. "It's very short."

"There was nothing more to say," said Lalage; "so what was the good of going on?"

"I thought," I said, "and hoped that there might have been something in it about the effect the stuff had on Tom Kitterick. I have never been able to find out anything about that."

"It didn't do much to Tom Kitterick," said Lalage. "He was just as turkey eggy afterward as he was before. It didn't even smart, though I rubbed it in for nearly half an hour, and Tom Kitterick said I'd have the skin off his face, which just shows the silly sort of stuff it was. Not that I'd expect the Cat to have anything else except silly stuff. That's the kind she is. Anybody would know it by simply looking at her. Father, I don't believe you've got my ticket. Hadn't you better go and see about it?"

The Canon went in search of the station master and found him at last digging potatoes in a plot of ground beyond the signal box. It took some time to persuade him to part with anything so valuable as a ticket to Dublin.

"Lalage," I said, while the Canon was arguing with the station master, "I want you to write to me from school and tell me how you are getting on."

"I have a lot of letters to write," she said. "I'm not sure I can write to you."

"Try. I particularly want to know what Miss Pettigrew thinks of your English composition. I should mark you high for it myself."

"I have to write to father every week, and I've promised to answer Tom Kitterick when he lets me know how the new pigs are getting on."

"Still you might manage a line to me in between. If you do I'll send you a long answer or a picture postcard, whichever you like."

"I can't read your writing," said Lalage, "so I'd rather have the postcard."

The Canon returned just as the train steamed in. We put Lalage into a second-class compartment. Then I slipped away and gave the guard half a crown, charging him to look after Lalage and to see that no mischief happened to her on the way to Dublin. To my surprise he was unwilling to receive the tip. He told me that the Canon had already given him two shillings and he seemed to think that he was being overpaid for a simple, not very onerous, duty. I pressed my half crown into his hand and assured him that before he got to Dublin he would, if he really looked after Lalage, have earned more than four and sixpence.

"In fact," I said, "four and sixpence won't be nearly enough to compensate you for the amount of worry and anxiety you will go through. You must allow me to add another half crown and make seven shillings of it."

The man was a good deal surprised and seemed inclined to protest.

"You needn't hesitate," I said. "I wouldn't take on the job myself for double the money."

"It could be," said the guard pocketing my second half crown, "that the young lady might be for getting out at the wrong station. There's some of them does."

"Nothing so simple as that," I said. "Any ordinary young lady would get out at a wrong station, and a couple of shillings would be plenty to offer you for chasing her in again. This one----"

I hesitated, for I really did not know what Lalage was likely to do.

"I'll lock the door on her, anyway," said the guard.

"You may, but don't flatter yourself that you'll have her safe then. The only thing you can calculate on in the case of this particular young lady is that whatever she does will be something that you couldn't possibly guess beforehand. Not that there's any real harm in her. She's simply possessed of an adventurous spirit and striking originality. Good-bye."

I had just time to shake hands with Lalage before the train started. She waved her pocket handkerchief cheerily to us as we stood together on the platform. I caught a glimpse of the guard's face while his van swept past us. It wore a set expression, like that of a man determined in the cause of duty to go steadily forward into the unknown facing dread things bravely. I was satisfied that I had made a deep impression on him and I felt sorry that I had not made up his tip to an even half sovereign.

The Canon was depressed as we drove home together. I felt it my duty to cheer him up as much as I could.

"After all," I said, "you've nothing to reproach yourself with. Miss Battersby has got another situation. She'll be far happier at Thormanby's than she ever could have been with you. His girls are thoroughly well brought up."

"She was very fond of Lalage," said the Canon.

"Still, they didn't suit each other. Miss Battersby will get over any feeling of regret she may have at first. She'll be far more at home with quiet, well-tamed girls like Thormanby's."

The Canon was not listening to me. I judged from this that it was not anxiety about Miss Battersby's future that was preying on his mind. I tried again.

"If it's the thought of that bottle of glycerine and cucumber which is worrying you," I said, "don't let it. Send her another. Send her two. Make Tom Kitterick carry them over to Thormanby Park and present them on bended knee, clad only in his shirt and with a halter round his neck."

The Canon's gloom merely deepened.

"I don't think," I said, "that you need fret about Miss Pettigrew. After all, it's her job. She must meet plenty of high-spirited girls."

"I wasn't thinking of her," said the Canon.

Then he began to murmur to himself and I was barely able, by leaning over toward him, to catch the quotation.

"Miserarum est neque amori dare ludem. . . ."

He saw that I was listening and lapsed into English. "There's a translation of that ode," he said, "into something quite like the original metre":

*"'How unhappy is the maiden who with Cupid may not play,
And who may not touch the wine cup, but must listen all the day
To an uncle and the scourging of his tongue'"*

"Come now, Canon," I said, "Lalage is a precocious child, I know. But she won't feel those particular deprivations yet awhile. She didn't try to flirt with Tom Kitterick, did she?"

"It's all the same thing really," said the Canon. "The confinement and discipline will be just as severe on her as they were on that girl of Horace's, though, of course, they will take a different form. She's been accustomed to a good deal of freedom and independence."

"According to the Archdeacon," I said, "to more than was good for her."

"I couldn't help that."

"No, you couldn't. Nobody could. My mother thinks Miss Pettigrew may, but I don't believe it myself. Lalage will break out all right as soon as she gets a chance."

For the first time since we left the station the Canon smiled and seemed a little more cheerful.

"If I thought that----" he said.

"You may be perfectly sure of it, but I don't think you ought actually to hope it. The Archdeacon is a very wise man and I'm sure that, if he contemplates the possibility at all, he fears it."

"I suppose so," said the Canon, sighing again. "It will all be a great change for Lalage, whatever happens."

CHAPTER IV

I feared at first that Lalage was not going to write to me. Nearly three weeks passed before I got a letter from her and I was inclined to blame her for neglect of an old friend. When the letter did arrive I understood that I had no right to be angry. Lalage was better than I had dared to hope. She kept a kind of irregular diary in an exercise book and sent it to me. It was, like all diaries, in disconnected paragraphs, evidently written down when the mood for recording experiences was on Lalage. There were no dates attached, but the first entry must, I think, embody the result of a very early series of impressions. One, at least, of the opinions expressed in it was modified later on:

"When I arrived I was hustled into a room by a small fat lady dressed in purple; not the old Pet, which is what we call Miss Pettigrew. I waited for ten minutes. Then I was hustled upstairs by the same purple-clothed lady, and shown a locker, Number 73. There I stayed for about five minutes and then was driven down again by the purple-clothed lady and pushed into the same room as I had been before. Again I was herded off (after about five minutes), needless to say by the purple-robed woman, and shoved into a waiting-room."

Lalage's patience must by this time have been wearing thin. It is noticeable that the "lady" had become a mere "woman" in the last sentence.

"There I stayed twenty minutes, a long twenty minutes, and lo! there came the purple-dressed woman unto me and bore me away to be examined. She slung me at the mercy of a mistress who gave me a desk (with a chair clamped to the ground) paper, pen and examination papers. Could you answer the following: Who succeeded (a) Stephen, (b) John, (c) Edward III? I said to the old Pet, 'This is all rotten.' (By the way, I had been sent off to her when I had done.) And she replied, 'Oh, that's not at all a nice word for a young lady to use. We can't have that here.' She's rather an ass.

"I was made to feel exactly like Lady Macbeth to-day at algebra. When Miss Campbell turned her back, another girl dared me to put my pen in Miss Campbell's red ink. (This is strictly against the law.) So of course I did. But instead of mopping it straight off like a fool I displayed it with pride. Consequently it fell all over my hands. Miss Campbell was just coming up so I had to hide them murmuring 'Out, damned spot!' etc. Luckily she didn't see, for she's just the sort that would report you like a shot."

"The names of suburban houses are awfully funny."

This entry evidently followed one of Lalage's first outings. I felt acutely the contrast between the pleasant chestnut tree, the fragrant sty, and the paved footways along which she is now condemned to tramp.

"An awful, staring, backgardenly looking house, with muslin curtains, frilly and a jumpy looking pattern on the side is called 'Sans Souci!' One ass calls his stable Cliftonville, although I bet he's never seen Clifton. Ardenbough and Honeysuckle Arbour are common.

"To-day we heard a frightful row in the corridor, laughing, talking, and trampling. Miss Campbell half rose and said: 'I must put a stop to this.' Before she could, the door was flung open and in bounced--the old Pet and three visitors! After a moment's conversation with Miss Campbell she retired, banging the door in a way she'd expel any one else for.

"This letter *is* lasting on. Hilda gets sixpence every time she is top, threepence second, and twopence third, but does not get any regular pocket money. She's very rich at present, as she's been top three times running. How I'd like to play Rugby football. It looks enticing to be let knock a person down. It *is* a pity girls can't, only lucky boys. I wonder why I feel poorer here than at home and yet have more money."

The Canon had, I am sure, provided Lalage with a suitable amount of pocket money. I myself gave her five shillings the day before she left home. She ought not to feel poor. Compared to Hilda, who has one-and-sixpence, earned in the sweat of her brow, Lalage must seem a millionaire.

"Do you know the kind of person who you hate and yet can't help loving although you are afraid of her? That is the sort the old Pet is. As I was going into school to-day she was standing at the door. The beast promptly spotted the fact that I had no hair ribbon, and remarked in awe-inspiring tones, 'Lalage, where is your hair ribbon?' 'Forgot it,' said I, and took a lecture with a polite grin. The old Pet may be a beast, but is *not* an ass. I hope the weather will improve soon.

"There is no doubt that I am of a persevering nature or I would not continue to write this letter. I fear it is so long that you'll never get through it, though I did not know it until now. I know a girl who is learning Greek. She's awful, and so clever. She is in my Latin class and prime favourite with Carpy.

"Your affect.

"Lalage."

Carpy cannot be the real name of the lady who teaches Latin to Lalage and Greek to the awful girl. I have tried to reconstruct her name from its corruption, but have hitherto failed to satisfy myself. She may be a Miss Chartres. Perhaps she is the purple-gowned woman who hustled, pushed, herded and slung Lalage on the day of her arrival. She cannot, in any case, be identified with the mathematician who uses red ink. No ingenuity in nicknaming could extract Carpy from Campbell.

There was, in spite of its great length, a postscript to Lalage's letter. There was also an enclosure.

"P.S. What does 'flippant' mean? The old Pet said my comp. was flippant, and I don't know what that is. It was my first comp."

I unfolded the "comp." and read it carefully:

Composition on Politeness by Lalage Beresford

Politeness is a very difficult art to acquire. It is altogether an acquired art, for no one is polite when he is born. Some sorts of politeness are sensible and they are comparatively easy to learn. Begging a person's pardon when we tread on their toes is polite and is a reasonable thing to do. But there are many silly things to learn before we become really polite. For instance, a boy must learn to open the door for ladies and walk after them always. This does the ladies no good and is sometimes very inconvenient for the boy. He may be in a hurry. It is not polite for a girl to sit with her legs crossed and her head leaning aback on her hands. This is a position which does no one any harm, so it is absurd that it should be considered unpolite. In old days politeness was carried to much greater extremities than it is now. In the days when they used to fight duels, when two gentlemen felt really annoyed, instead of one of them saying to the other, "Go and get your sword and let me kill you," and the other replying, "All right, I shall be delighted to kill a man whom I detest," they demanded "satisfaction" of each other in most polite tones and parted with low bows and polite, though sneering, smiles. Politeness is a very good thing in moderation, but not if carried too far.

Skeat traces the word "flippant" back through "flip" and the old Northumbrian present participle ending "an" to the Icelandic "fleipa," which means to prattle--I found this out in a dictionary and copied it down for Lalage. Miss Pettigrew was not, I think, justified in applying the word, supposing that she used it in its strict etymological sense, to Lalage's composition. There was more in the essay than mere prattle. But Miss Pettigrew may have had reasons of her own, reasons which I can only guess, for wishing to depreciate this particular essay. It is quite possible that she was herself the person who told Lalage that it is rude for a girl to sit with her legs crossed. My mother, to whom I showed the composition when I consulted her about the probable meaning of flippant, refused to entertain this suggestion. She knows Miss Pettigrew and does not think she is the kind of person who would attach excessive importance to the position of Lalage's legs. She thinks that the maxim referred to by Lalage--there evidently was a maxim in her mind when she wrote--must have fallen from the lips of Miss Campbell, the mathematician, Carpy, or the purple-gowned woman. If she is right, I can only suppose that Miss Pettigrew in using the word flippant meant to support the authority of her subordinates and to snub Lalage for attempting to rebel against time-honoured tradition.

I walked across to the rectory after luncheon, intending to show my letter and the composition on politeness to the Canon. I found him seriously upset. He had received a letter from Lalage, and he had also enjoyed a visit from the Archdeacon. He was ill-advised in showing the letter to the Archdeacon. I should have had more sense. I suppose he thought that, dealing as it did almost entirely with religious subjects, it was likely to interest the Archdeacon. It did interest him. It interested him excessively, to an extent which occasioned a good deal of trouble.

"Dear Father: I have read nearly the whole of the 'Earthly Paradise' since I came here. It is an awfully jolly book. ('Little Folks' is Miss Campbell's idea of literature for the young; but that's all rot of course.) Who wrote the Litany? If you do not know please ask the Archdeacon when you see him. I've come to the conclusion that some of it is very well written."

"I did ask the Archdeacon," said the Canon, looking up from the letter, "and he said he'd hunt up the point when he went home."

"Lalage," I said, "has quite a remarkable feeling for style. See the way she writes about the 'Earthly Paradise.' It must be the way you brought her up on quotations from Horace. Miss Campbell hardly appreciates her, I'm afraid. But of course you can't expect a mathematician to rise much above 'Little Folks' in the way of literature. I suppose the Archdeacon was greatly pleased with that conundrum about the Litany."

"It was what followed," said the Canon, "which excited him."

He began to read again:

"There is a clergyman who comes once a week to give us a scripture lesson. He is only a curate and looks very shy. We had a most exciting time with him yesterday. We all shied paper wads, and he moved nearly every one up and sent one girl out of the room."

"He can't," I said, "have been as shy as he looked. But I'm beginning to understand why the Archdeacon was shocked."

"He didn't mind that," said the Canon; "at least not much."

Lalage's letter went on:

"I was glad, that it wasn't me, who was just as bad, that he didn't what he calls 'make an example of.' Even that didn't calm the excited class and he said, 'Next person who laughs will be reported to Miss Pettigrew.' It was not me, but the girl next me, Eileen Fraser. I was the innocent cause of the offence. (A mere wink at Hilda when I had my belt round her neck.) She was not, however, reported, even to Carpy."

"By the way," I said, "who is Carpy? She comes into my letter too."

The Canon did not know and seemed uninterested in the point. He went on reading:

"Another day he committed an unforgivable offence. He said to us, 'You must stand up when quoting the words of the Bible.'"

"Isn't that always considered essential?" I asked. "The unforgivable offence," said the Canon, "is in the next sentence."

"But *he* sat with his feet on the fender, the pig. I do hate that sort. Even when Hilda said that Ananias told a lie and was turned into a pillar of salt he did not laugh. He said he'd turn one girl out of the room to-day for nothing but dropping her pen."

"The Archdeacon," I said, "could of course sympathize with that curate."

"It wasn't that which made him really angry," said the Canon, "although he didn't like it."

"There must be something pretty bad coming, if it's worse than that."

The Canon sighed heavily and went on reading

"Hilda taught me the two-step at rec. Another girl (also in my class and jolly nice) played them."

The Canon looked up with a puzzled expression. I explained as well as I could.

"The two-step," I said, "is a dance. What the jolly, nice girl played is a little obscure, but I think it must have been tunes suitable to the performance of the two-step. 'Rec.' is a shortened form of recreation. Lalage is fond of these contractions. She writes to me about her comp."

The canon read: "On the other days, the old Pet takes us herself at Scrip: We were at Genesis, and she read out, 'In the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.' But of course you all know He didn't. Modern science teaches us----' Then she went on with a lot of rot about gases and forces and nebulous things."

"The Archdeacon," said the Canon, "is going to write to the Archbishop of Dublin about it. He says that kind of teaching ought not to be allowed."

"We must head him off somehow," I said, "if he really means it. But he hardly can. I don't expect he'll run into extremes. He certainly won't without taking advice. The Archdeacon isn't a man to do anything definite in a hurry. He's told me over and over again that he deprecates precipitancy of action."

"He feels very strongly about the Higher Criticism. Very strongly indeed. He says it's poisoning the wells of religion in the home."

"Last time he lunched with us he said it was sapping the foundations. Still I scarcely think he'll want to institute a heresy prosecution against Miss Pettigrew."

"I'm very much afraid--he seemed most determined----"

"We must switch him off on to some other track," I said. "If you funk tackling him----"

"I did my best."

"I suppose that I'd better try him. It's a nuisance. I hate arguing with archdeacons; but of course we can't have Lalage put into a witness box and ballyragged by archbishops and people of that kind, and she'd be the only available witness. Hilda can't be in a position to give a clear account of what happened, considering that she was half strangled by Lalage's belt at the time."

"It was at the curate's class that the belt incident occurred," said the Canon, "just after they had been throwing paper wads."

"So it was. All the same I don't think Hilda would be much use as a witness. The memory of that choking would be constantly with her and would render every scripture lesson a confused nightmare for months afterward. The other girls would probably lose their heads. It's all well enough to pelt curates with paper wads. Any one could do that. It's quite a different thing to stand up before an ecclesiastical court and answer a string of questions about nebulous things. That Archbishop will find himself relying entirely on Lalage to prove the Archdeacon's case, which won't be a nice position for her. I'll go home now and drive over at once to see the Archdeacon."

"Do," said the Canon. "I'd go with you only I hate this kind of fuss. Some men like it. The Archdeacon, for instance. Curious, isn't it, how differently we're made, though we all look very much alike from the outside. 'Sunt quos cumculo---'" I did not wait to hear the end of the quotation.

I approached the Archdeacon hopefully, relying, I confess, less on the intrinsic weight of the arguments I meant to use than on the respect which I knew the Archdeacon entertained for my position in the county. My mother is the sister of the present Lord Thormanby, a fact which by itself predisposes the Archdeacon in my favour. My father was a distinguished soldier. My grandfather was a still more distinguished soldier, and there are pictures of his most successful battle hanging in my dining-room. The Archdeacon has often seen them and I am sure appreciates them. I am also, for an Irish landlord, a well-off man. I might, so I believed, have trusted entirely to these facts to persuade the

Archdeacon to give up the idea of communicating Miss Pettigrew's lapse into heterodoxy to the Archbishop. But I worked out a couple of sound arguments as well, and I was greatly surprised to find that I produced no effect whatever on the Archdeacon. He bluntly refused to modify his plan of action.

I quoted to him the proverb which warns us to let sleeping dogs lie. Under any ordinary circumstances this would have appealed strongly to the Archdeacon. It was just the kind of wisdom by which he guides his life. I was taken aback when he replied that Miss Petti-grew, so far from being a sleeping dog, was a roaring lion. A moment later he called her a ravenous evening wolf; so I gave up my proverb as useless. I then reminded him that Lalage was evidently quite unaffected by the teaching which she received, had in fact described modern science as a lot of rot. The Archdeacon replied that, though Lalage escaped, others might be affected; and that he was not quite sure even about Lalage, because insidious poisons are most to be feared when they lie dormant in the system for a time.

This brought me to the end of my two arguments and I had to invent another on the spot. I am always rather ashamed to think of the one I actually used, but I was driven against the wall and the position seemed almost desperate. I suggested that Lalage's account of the scripture lesson was in all probability quite unreliable.

"You know, Archdeacon," I said, "that all little girls are horrid liars."

The insinuation that Lalage ever spoke anything but the truth was treacherous and abominable. She has her faults; but I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that her description of Miss Pettigrew's scripture lesson was a perfectly honest account of the impression it produced on her mind. The Archdeacon hesitated, and, hoping for the best, I plunged deeper.

"Lalage in particular," I said, "is absolutely reckless about the truth."

The Archdeacon shook his head mournfully.

"I wish I could think so," he said. "I should be glad, indeed, if I could take your view of the matter; but in these days when the Higher Criticism is invading our pulpits and our school rooms----"

His voice faded away into the melancholy silence and he continued shaking his head.

This shows how much more important dogmatic truth is than the ordinary everyday correspondence between statement and fact. To the Archdeacon a lie of Lalage's would have been a minor evil in every way preferable, if it came to a choice between the two, to Miss Pettigrew's unorthodox interpretation of the Mosaic narrative. I could argue the matter no more and fell back upon a last plan.

"Archdeacon," I said, "come out and dine with us to-night. Talk the whole business over with my mother before you take any definite action."

The Archdeacon agreed to do this. I went home at once and prepared my mother for the conflict.

"You must use all your influence," I said. "It is a most serious business."

"My dear boy," said my mother, "it's quite the most ridiculous storm in a tea cup of which I've ever heard."

"No," I said solemnly, "it's not. If the Archdeacon makes his charge formally the Archbishop will be obliged to take it up. Miss Pettigrew will be hauled up before him----"

"Miss Pettigrew," said my mother, "would simply laugh. She's not in the very least the sort of woman----"

"I know. She's one of those people that you hate awfully and yet can't help loving though you are rather afraid of her. It's for her sake more than Lalage's that I'm asking you to interfere."

"If I interfere at all it will be for the Archdeacon's sake. It's a pity to allow him to make a fool of himself."

I do not know what line my mother actually took with the Archdeacon. I left them together after dinner and when the time came for saying good-night I found that the Archdeacon had been persuaded not to attempt a formal protest against Miss Pettigrew's teaching. He has never, however, trusted her since then and he still shakes his head doubtfully at the mention of her name.

I wrote to Lalage next day and told her not to send home any more accounts of scripture lessons. English compositions, I said, we should be glad to receive. Latin exercises would always be welcome, and algebra sums, especially if worked in Miss Campbell's red ink, would be regarded as treasured possessions.

"All letters," I added, "suspected of containing ecclesiastical news of any kind will be returned to you unopened."

I also called on the Canon and spoke plainly to him about the danger and folly of showing letters to the Archdeacon.

"I was wrong," said the Canon apologetically. "I can see now that I was wrong, but I thought at the time that he'd enjoy the joke."

"You ought," said I severely, "to have had more sense. The Archdeacon expects to be a bishop some day. He can't afford to enjoy jokes of that kind. By the way, did he tell you who wrote the Litany?"

CHAPTER V

It must have been about three weeks after the pacification of the Archdeacon by my mother that a crisis occurred in my affairs. I am not a person of any importance, although I shall be, I fear, some day; and my affairs up to the present are not particularly interesting even to myself. I record the crisis because it explains the fact that I lost touch with Lalage for nearly four years and know little or nothing about her development during that time. I wish I knew more. Some day, when I have a little leisure, I mean to have a long talk with Miss Pettigrew. She saw more of Lalage in those days than any one else did, and I think she must have some very interesting, perhaps exciting, things to tell. To a sympathetic listener Miss Pettigrew would talk freely. She has a sense of humour, and like all people who are capable of laughing themselves, takes a pleasure in telling good stories.

It was my uncle, Lord Thormanby, who was mainly responsible for my private crisis. My mother, I daresay, goaded him on; but he has always taken the credit for arranging that I should join the British embassy in Lisbon as a kind of unpaid attache. My uncle used his private and political influence to secure this desirable post for me. I do not know exactly whom he worried. Perhaps it was a sympathetic Prime Minister, perhaps the Ambassador himself, a nobleman distantly connected with Lady Thonnanby. At all events, the thing was done and Thonnanby was enormously proud of the achievement. He gave me a short lecture by way of a send-off, in which he dwelt a good deal on his own interest in my future and told me that my appointment might lead on to something big. It has not done so, up to the present, but that I daresay is my own fault.

The Canon, who seemed sorry to say good-bye to me, gave me a present of an English translation of the works of the philosopher Epictetus, with several passages, favourites of his own, marked in red ink. One of these I used frequently to read and still think about occasionally, not because I have the slightest intention of trying to live in the spirit of it, but because it always reminds me of the Canon himself, and so makes me smile. "Is a little of your oil spilt, or a little wine stolen?" said this philosopher. "Then say to yourself: 'For so much peace is bought. This is the price of tranquillity.' For nothing can be gained without paying for it." It is by this wisdom that the man who happened to be Lalage's father was able to live without worrying himself into frequent fevers.

The Archdeacon dined with us a short time before I left home and gave me a very fine valedictory address. He said that I was about to follow the example of my ancestors and devote myself to the service of my country. He had every hope that I would acquit myself as nobly as they did. This was a very affecting thing to say, particularly in our dining-room, with the pictures of my grandfather's battles hanging round the walls. I looked at them while he spoke, but I did not venture to look at my mother. Her eyes have a way of twinkling when the Archdeacon is at his best which always upsets me. The Archdeacon, his face still raised toward the large battle picture, added that there is nothing finer than the service of one's country, nothing more inspiring for a man and nothing more likely to lead to fame. I felt at the time that this is very likely to be true in the case of any one who has a country to serve. I, unfortunately, have none. The recent developments of Irish life, the revivals of various kinds, the books which people keep on writing, and the general atmosphere of the country have robbed me and others like me of the belief, held comfortably by our fathers, that we are Englishmen. On the other hand, nobody, least of all the patriotic politicians who make speeches, will admit that we are Irish. We are thus, without any fault of our own, left poised in a state of quivering uncertainty like the poor Samaritans whom the Jews despised as Gentiles and the Gentiles did not like because they seemed to be Jews. I found it difficult, while I listened to the Archdeacon, to decide what country had a claim on me for service. Perhaps Portugal--I was going to Lisbon--would mark me for her own.

For more than three years I saw nothing of Lalage. My holidays, snatched with difficulty from a press of ridiculously unimportant duties, never corresponded with hers. I heard very little of her. The Canon never wrote to me at all about Lalage or anything else. My mother merely chronicled her scholastic successes, which included several prizes for English composition.

The one really interesting piece of information which I got about her came, curiously enough, from the Archdeacon. He wrote to me for a subscription to a fund for something, rebuilding the bishop's palace I think. At the end of his letter he mentioned an incident in Lalage's career which he described as deplorable. It appeared that a clergyman, a man of some eminence according to the Archdeacon and so, presumably, not the original curate had set an examination paper intended to test the religious knowledge of Lalage and others. In it he quoted some words from one of St Paul's epistles: "I keep my body under and have it in subjection," and asked what they meant. Lalage submitted a novel interpretation. "St. Paul," she wrote, "is here speaking of that mystical body which is the Church. It ought always to be kept under and had in subjection."

As a diplomatist--I suppose I am a diplomatist of a minor kind--whose lot is cast among the Latin peoples, I am inclined to think that Lalage's interpretation may one day be universally accepted as the true one and so honoured with the crown of orthodoxy. It would even to-day strike a Portuguese journalist as a simple statement of an obvious truth. The Archdeacon regarded it as deplorable, and I understood from his letter that the old charge of flippancy had been revived against Lalage. She must, I suppose, have disliked the man who set the examination paper. I cannot otherwise

account for the viciously anti-clerical spirit of her answer.

The next important news I got of Lalage reached me in the spring of the fourth year I spent in the service of somebody else's country. It came in a letter from Lalage herself, written on paper headed by the letters A.T.R.S. embossed in red. She wrote:

"You'll be glad to hear that I entered Trinity College last October and since then have been enjoying 'the spacious times of great Elizabeth.' Our society, girls, is called the Elizabethan. That's the point of the quotation."

I glanced at the head of the paper, but failed to see how A.T.R.S. could possibly stand for Elizabethan Society. Lalage's letter continued:

"There is nothing equal to a university life for broadening out the mind and enlarging one's horizon. I have just founded a new society called the A.T.R.S., and the committee (Hilda, myself, and a boy called Selby-Harrison, who got a junior ex and is *very* clever) is on the lookout for members, subscription—a year, paid in advance, or life members one pound. Our object is to check by every legitimate means the spread of tommyrot in this country and the world generally. There is a great deal too much of it and something ought to be done to make people jolly well ashamed of themselves before it is too late. If the matter is not taken in hand vigorously the country will be submerged and all sensible people will die."

I began to get at the meaning of the red letters. T.R. S. plainly stood for Tommy Rot Society. The preliminary "A" could indicate nothing else but the particle anti. The prospect before us, if Lalage is anything of a judge, and I suppose she must be, is sufficiently serious to justify the existence of the society.

"Each member of the committee is pledged to expose in the press by means of scathing articles, and thus hound out of public life any man, whatever his position, who is caught talking tommyrot. This will be done anonymously, so as to establish a reign of terror under which no man of any eminence will feel safe. The committee intends to begin with bishops of all denominations. I thought this would interest you now that you are an ambassador and engaged in fostering international complications."

I read this with a feeling of discomfort similar to that of the gentleman who set the examination paper on St. Paul's epistles. There, seemed to me to be a veiled threat in the last sentence. The committee intended to begin with bishops, but there cannot be above sixty or seventy bishops in Ireland altogether, even including the ex-moderators of the Presbyterian General Assembly, not more than a hundred. An energetic committee would certainly be able to deal with them in less than three months. Whose turn would come next? Quite possibly the diplomatists. I do not particularly object to the prospect of being hounded out of public life by means of scathing articles; but I feel that I should not be the only victim. Some of the others would certainly resent Lalage's action and then there would be a fuss. I have always hated fuss of any kind.

"Only members of the committee are expected to take part in the active propaganda of the society. Ordinary members merely subscribe. I am sending this appeal to father, Lord Thormanby, Miss Battersby, who is still there, and the Archdeacon, as well as to you."

I breathed a sigh of great relief. Lalage was not threatening my colleagues with exposure in the press.

She was merely asking for a subscription. I wrote at once, warmly commending the objects and methods of the society. I enclosed a cheque for five pounds with a request that I should be enrolled as five ordinary life members. I underlined the word ordinary, and added a postscript in which I expressly refused to act on the committee even if elected. Lalage did not answer this letter or acknowledge the cheque. I suppose the bishops kept her very busy.

In August that year I met Lalage again for the first time since I had seen her off to school from the station at Drumbo. I did not recognize her at first. Four years make a great difference in a girl when she is passing from the age of fourteen onward. Besides, I was not in the least expecting to see her.

Mont 'Estoril is a watering place near the mouth of the Tagus. In spite of the fact that some misguided people advertise its attractions and call it the Riviera of Portugal, it is a pleasant spot to live in when Lisbon is very hot. There are several excellent hotels there and I have found it a good plan to migrate from the capital and settle down in Mont 'Estoril for June, July and August. I have to go into Lisbon every day, but this is no great hardship, for there is a convenient train service. I usually catch what the Portuguese call a train of "great velocity" and arrive at the Caes da Sodre railway station a few minutes after eleven o'clock. From that I go, partly on foot, partly in a tram, to the embassy and spend my time there in the usual way.

One morning—I have kept a note of the date; it was the ninth of August—I saw a large crowd of people, plainly tourists, standing together on the footpath, waiting for a tram. The sight was common enough. Every ten days or so an enterprising steamboat company lands a bevy of these worthy people in Lisbon. This crowd was a little larger than usual. It was kept together by three guides who were in charge of the party and who galloped, barking furiously, along the outskirts of the herd whenever a wild or frightened tourist made any attempt to break away. On the opposite side of the road were two young girls. One of them, very prettily dressed in bright blue, was adjusting a hand camera with the intention of photographing the tourists and attendant watchdog guides. She did not succeed, because one of the

guides recognized her as a member of his flock and crossed the road to where she stood. I know the man slightly. He is a cosmopolitan, a linguist of great skill, who speaks good English, with Portuguese suavity of manner, in times of calm, but bad English, with French excitability of gesture, when he is annoyed. He reasoned, most politely I'm sure, with the two girls. He wanted them to cross the road and take their places among the other tourists. The girl in blue handed the camera to her companion, took the cosmopolitan guide by the shoulders, pushed him across the road and posed him in a picturesque attitude on the outskirts of the crowd. Then she went back to take her picture. The guide, of course, followed her, and I could see by the vehemence of his shrugs and gesticulations that his temper had given way. I guessed that his English must have been almost unintelligible. The scene interested me and I stood still to see how it would end. The girl in the blue dress changed her intention and tried to photograph the excited interpreter while he gesticulated. I sympathized with her wish. His attitudes were all well worth preserving. If she had been armed with phonograph as well as a camera she might have secured a really valuable record. The man, to my knowledge, speaks eight languages, all equally badly, and when he mixes them he is well worth listening to. In order to get him into focus the girl in the blue dress kept backing away from him, holding the camera level and gazing into the view finder. The man, gesticulating more wildly than ever, followed her. She moved more and more rapidly away from him until at last she was proceeding backward along the street at a rapid trot. In the end she bumped against me. I staggered and clutched at my hat. She turned, and, without appearing in the least put out, began to apologize. Then her face lit with a sudden smile of recognition.

"Oh," she said, "it's you?"

I recognized the voice and then the face. I also retained my presence of mind.

"Begging a person's pardon," I said, "when we tread on their toes is a polite and reasonable thing to do."

Lalage may have recognized the quotation, although I do not think I had it quite right. She certainly smiled agreeably. But she had no time to waste on exchanging reminiscences.

"Just make that idiot stand where he is for a moment," she said, "till I get him photographed. I wouldn't miss him for pounds. He's quite unique."

The interpreter protested volubly in Portuguese mixed with Spanish and French. He was, so he told me, placed in charge of the tourists by the steamboat company which had brought them to Lisbon. If one of them got lost he would have to answer for it, answer for it with his head, and the senora, the two exceedingly headstrong senoras, would get lost unless they could be penned in with the rest of his flock.

I glanced at Lalage several times while the interpreter harangued us, and noticed that she had grown into an extremely pretty girl. She, it seemed, was also taking stock of me.

"You've improved," she said. "Your moustache has broadened out. If that monkey on a stick won't be photographed I wish you'd hunt him away out of this. I don't know any Portuguese swears or I'd do it myself."

I explained to the interpreter that he need be under no anxiety about the headstrong senoras. I myself would be responsible for them, and would, if necessary, answer for their safety with my head. He departed, doubtful and ill content. He was probably satisfied that I was capable of looking after Lalage, but he dreaded the effect of her example on the rest of his flock. They too might escape.

"This," said Lalage, leading me up to the other girl, who wore a pink dress, "is Hilda. You've heard of Hilda."

Hilda's name was printed on my memory. She is one of the three members of the committee of the A.T.R.S. I shook hands with her and asked for Selby-Harrison.

"You haven't surely," I said, "come without Selby-Harrison, who won the junior ex? The committee ought to hold together."

"We intended to bring him," said Lalage, "but there were difficulties. The Archdeacon heard about it----"

"That Archdeacon again!" I said.

"And told father that it wouldn't do at all. Did you ever hear such nonsense? I shouldn't have minded that, but Hilda's mother struck too. It ended in our having to bring poor old Pussy with us as chaperon."

"Pussy?"

"Yes, The original Cat, Miss Battersby. You can't have forgotten her, surely? It happened that she was getting her holidays just as we had arranged to start, so we took her instead of Selby-Harrison, which satisfied the Archdeacon and Hilda's mother."

"I am so glad to hear you call her 'Pussy' now," I said-"I always hoped you would."

"She's really not a bad sort," said Lalage, "when you get to know her. She did us very little harm on the steamer. She was sick the whole way out, so we just put her in the top berth of our cabin and left her there."

"Is she there still?"

Hilda giggled. Lalage looked slightly annoyed.

"Of course not," she said. "We aren't cruel. We hauled her out this morning and dressed her. It was rather a job but we did it. We took her ashore with us--each holding one arm, for she was frightfully staggy at first--and made her smuggle our cigarettes for us through the custom-house. No one would suspect her of having cigarettes. By the way, she has them still. They're in a large pocket which I sewed on the inside of her petticoat. She's over there in the crowd. Would you very much mind getting----?"

"I couldn't possibly," I said hastily. "She'd be almost certain to object, especially with all those people standing round. You must wait till you get to an hotel and then undress her again yourselves."

"Don't be an ass," said Lalage. "I don't want you to get the cigarettes. I want you to rescue Pussy herself. It wouldn't be at all fair to allow her to be swept away in that crowd. We'd never see her again."

I did not much care for undertaking this task either, though it was certainly easier than the other. The polyglot guide would, I felt sure, deeply resent the rape of another of his charges.

"Couldn't Hilda do that?" I said. "After all, she's a member of the committee. I'm not. And you told me distinctly that ordinary members were not expected to do anything except subscribe."

"Go on, Hilda," said Lalage.

I suppose Lalage must be president of the A.T.R.S. and be possessed of autocratic powers. Hilda crossed the road without a murmur. Selby-Harrison, I have no doubt, would have acted in the same way if he had been here.

"And now, Lalage," I said, "you must tell me what brings you to Portugal."

"To see you," said Lalage promptly.

"It's very nice of you to say that," I said, "and I feel greatly flattered."

"Hilda was all for Oberammergau, and Selby-Harrison wanted Normandy. He said there were churches and things there but I think churches are rather rot, don't you?"

"Besides," I said, "after the way the society has been treating bishops it would hardly be decent to accept their hospitality by wandering about through their churches. Any bishop, especially if he'd been driven out of public life by a series of scathing articles, published anonymously, would have a genuine grievance if you----"

"It was really that which decided us on coming here," said Lalage.

"Quite right. There is a most superior kind of bishop here, a Patriarch, and I am sure that anything you publish about him in the Portuguese papers----"

"You don't understand what I mean. You're getting stupid, I think. I'm not talking about bishops. I'm talking about you."

"Don't bother about taking up my case until you've quite finished the bishops. I am a young man still, with years and years before me in which I shall no doubt talk a lot of tommyrot. It would be a pity to drive me out of public life before I've said anything which you can really scathe."

"We thought," said Lalage, "that as it didn't much matter to us where we went we might as well come out to see you. You were the only person who gave a decent 'sub' to the society. I'll explain our new idea to you later on."

"I'm very glad I did," I said. "If another fiver would bring Selby-Harrison by the next steamer--Hullo! Here's Hilda back with Miss Battersby. I hardly thought she'd have succeeded in getting her. How do you do, Miss Battersby? I'm delighted to welcome you to Lisbon, and I must do my best for you now you're here. I'm quite at your disposal for the day."

Miss Battersby smiled feebly. She had not yet recovered from the effects of the sea voyage.

"First," said Lalage, "we'll go to an hotel."

"Of course," I said, "to get the cigarettes."

"No," said Lalage; "to let Miss Battersby get to bed. She wants to get to bed, doesn't she, Hilda?"

Hilda, who was supporting Miss Battersby, and so in a position to judge of her condition, nodded.

"She's frightfully weak," said Lalage to me, "on account of not having eaten anything except two water biscuits and an apple for nearly a week."

"In that case," I said, "a little luncheon----"

"Could you eat luncheon?" said Lalage to Miss Battersby.

Miss Battersby seemed to wish to try.

"Could she, Hilda?" said Lalage. "It's a long time since she has."

"She must make a beginning some day," I said.

"I still think she'd be better in bed," said Lalage.

"After lunch," I said firmly, "You ought not to be vindictive, Lalage. It's a long time since that trouble about the character of Mary."

"I'm not thinking of that," said Lalage.

"And she's not a bishop. Why should you starve her?"

"Very well," said Lalage. "Do whatever you like, but don't blame me afterward if she's---- she was, on the steamer, horribly."

We fed Miss Battersby on some soup, a fragment of fried fish and a glass of light wine. She evidently wanted to eat an omelette as well, but Lalage forbade this. Whether she was actually put to bed afterward or merely laid down I do not know. She must have been at least partially undressed, for Lalage and Hilda were plentifully supplied with cigarettes during the afternoon.

CHAPTER VI

Lalage, Hilda, and I went for a drive in one of the attractive carriages which ply for hire in the Lisbon streets. We drove up one side of the Avenida de Liberdade and down the other. I did the duty of a good cicerone by pointing out the fountains, trees and other objects of interest which Lalage and Hilda were sure to see for themselves. When we had exhausted the Avenida I suggested going on to Belem. Lalage did not seem pleased. She said that driving was not her idea of pleasure. She wanted something more active and exciting. I agreed.

"We'll go in a tram," I said.

"Where to?"

"Belem."

"Belem's a church, isn't it, Hilda?"

Hilda and I both admitted that it was.

"Then we can't go there," said Lalage decidedly.

"Why not?" I ventured to ask.

"You said yourself that it wouldn't be decent."

"Oh!" I said, "you're thinking of those poor bishops; but you haven't done anything to the Portuguese patriarch yet. Besides, only half of Belem is a church. The other half is a school, quite secular."

"The only things I really want to see," said Lalage, "are the dead Portuguese kings in glass cases."

"The what?"

"The dead kings. Stuffed, I suppose. Do you mean to say you've been here nearly four years and don't yet know the way they keep their kings, like natural history specimens in a museum? Why, that was the very first thing Hilda found out in the guide book."

"I didn't," said Hilda. "It was you."

"Let's credit Selby-Harrison with the discovery," I said soothingly. "I remember now about those kings. But the exhibition has been closed to the public now for some years. We shan't be able to get in."

"What's the use of being an ambassador," said Lalage, "if you can't step in to see a dead king whenever you like?"

An ambassador may be able to claim audiences with deceased royalties, but I was not an ambassador. I offered Lalage as an alternative the nearest thing at my command to dead kings.

"The English cemetery," I said, "is considered one of the sights of Lisbon. If you are really interested in corpses we might go there."

"I hate Englishmen," said Lalage. "All Englishmen."

"That's why I suggested their cemetery. It will be immensely gratifying to you to realize what a lot of them have died. The place is nearly full and there are lots of yew trees."

Lalage did me the honour of laughing. Hilda, after a minute's consideration, also laughed. But they were not to be distracted from the dead kings.

"We'll go back to the hotel," said Lalage, "and rout out poor Pussy. She'll be wanting more food by this time. You can go and call on the present King or the Queen Mother, or whoever it is who keep the key of that mausoleum and then come back for us. By the way, before you go, just tell me the Portuguese for an ice. It's desperately hot."

I told her and then got out of the carriage. I did not call upon either the King or his mother. They were in Cintra, so I should not have had time to get at them even if I had wished. I saw my chief, and, with the fear of Lalage before my eyes, worried him until he gave me a letter to a high official. From him I obtained with great difficulty the permission I wanted. I returned to the hotel. Miss Battersby, though recovering rapidly, was still too feeble to accompany us; so Lalage, Hilda, and I set off without her.

The dead kings were a disappointment. Hilda's nerve failed her on the doorstep and she declined to go in. Lalage and I went through the exhibition alone. I observed, without surprise, that Lalage turned her eyes away from the objects she had come to inspect. I ventured, when we got out, to suggest that we might perhaps have spent a pleasanter afternoon at Belem. Lalage snubbed me sharply.

"Certainly not," she said. "I'm going in for the Vice-Chancellor's prize for English verse next year and the subject is mortality. I shall simply knock spots out of the other competitors when I work in those kings."

*"Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,"*

You know the sort of thing I mean."

"That's not original," I said. "I remember it distinctly in the 'Golden Treasury,' though I have forgotten the author's name."

"It wasn't meant to be original. I quoted it simply as an indication of the sort of line I mean to take in my poem."

"You'll win the prize to a certainty. When you publish the poem afterward with notes I hope you'll mention my name. Without me you wouldn't have got at those kings."

"In the meanwhile," said Lalage, "I could do with some tea and another ice. Couldn't you, Hilda?"

Hilda could and did. I took them to an excellent shop in the Rua Aurea, where Hilda had three ices and Lalage four, after tea. I only had one. Lalage twitted me with my want of appetite.

"I can't eat any more." I said. "The thought of poor Miss Battersby sitting alone in that stuffy hotel has spoiled my appetite."

"The hotel is stuffy," said Lalage. "Where are you stopping?"

I mentioned Mont 'Estoril and Lalage at once proposed to move her whole party out there.

There were difficulties with the Lisbon hotel keeper, who wanted to be paid for the beds which Lalage and Hilda had not slept in as well as for that which Miss Battersby had enjoyed during the afternoon. Lalage argued with him in French, which he understood very imperfectly, and she boasted afterward that she had convinced him of the unreasonableness of his demand. I, privately, paid his bill.

There were also difficulties with Miss Battersby. She had, so Hilda told me, the strongest possible objection to putting on her clothes again. But Lalage was determined. In less than an hour after our return to the hotel I was sitting opposite to Miss Battersby, who was swathed rather than dressed, in a railway carriage, speeding along the northern shore of the Tagus estuary.

I had, early in the summer, made friends with a Mr. and Mrs Dodds, who were living in my hotel. Mr. Dodds was a Glasgow merchant and was conducting the Portuguese side of his firm's business. Mrs. Dodds was a native of Paisley. They were both very fond of bridge, and I had got into the habit of playing with them every evening. We depended on chance for a fourth member of our party, and just at the time of Lalage's visit were particularly fortunate in securing a young English engineer who was installing a service of electric light somewhere in the neighbourhood. The Doddses were friendly people and I had gradually come to entertain a warm regard for them in spite of the extreme severity of their bridge and Mrs. Dodds's habit of speaking plainly about my mistakes. I would not, except under great pressure, cause any inconvenience or annoyance to the Doddses. But Lalage is great pressure. When she said that I was to spend the evening talking to her I saw at once that the bridge must be sacrificed. My plan was to apologize profusely to the Doddses, and leave them condemned for one evening to sit bridgeless till bedtime. But Lalage would not hear of this. She wanted, so she said, to talk confidentially to me. Miss Battersby was an obstacle in her way, and so she ordered me to introduce Miss Battersby as my substitute at the bridge table.

If Miss Battersby had acted reasonably and gone to bed either before or immediately after dinner this would have been unnecessary. But she did not. She became immoderately cheerful and was most anxious to enjoy herself. I set her down at the card table and then, as quickly as possible, fled. Miss Battersby's bridge is of the most rudimentary and irritating kind and she has a conscientious objection to paying for the small stakes which usually gave a brightness to our game. It was necessary for me to get out of earshot of the Doddses and the engineer before they discovered these two facts about Miss Battersby. I thought it probable that I should have to go to a new hotel next day in order to escape the reproaches of my friends. But I did not want to move that night, so I went into the hotel garden, hustling Hilda before me. There was no need to hustle Lalage. She understood the need for haste even better than I did. I knew Miss Battersby's capacity for bridge, having occasionally played with her in my uncle's house. Lalage understood how acutely the pain brought on by Miss Battersby's bridge would be aggravated by the deprecating sweetness of Miss Battersby's manner. In the hotel garden there were a number of chairs made, I expect, by a man whose regular business in life was the manufacture of the old-fashioned straw beehives. When forced by the introduction of the new wooden hives to turn his hand to making chairs, he failed to shake himself free of the tradition of his proper art. His chairs were as like beehives as it is possible for chairs to be and anybody who sits back in one of them is surrounded on all sides by walls and overshadowed by a hood of woven wicker-work. When Lalage sat down I could see no more of her than the glowing end of her cigarette and the toes of her shoes. Hilda was to the same extent invisible. I was annoyed by this at first, for Lalage is very pretty to look at and the night was not so dark when we sat down but that I could, had she been in any ordinary chair, have traced the outline of her figure. Later on, when our conversation reached its most interesting point, I was thankful to recollect that I also was in obscurity. I am not, owing to my training as a diplomatist, an easy man to startle, but Lalage gave me a severe shock. I prefer to keep my face in the shadow when I am moved to unexpected emotion.

"To-morrow," I said pleasantly, by way of opening the conversation, "we shall have another long day's sight-seeing, mitigated with ices."

"I'm sorry to say," said Lalage, "that we go home to-morrow. The steamer sails at 11 a.m."

"Surely there can be no real need for such hurry. Now that we have Miss Battersby among us the Archdeacon and Hilda's mother will be quite satisfied."

"It's not that in the least," said Lalage. "Is it, Hilda?"

Hilda said something about return tickets, but Lalage snubbed her. I gathered that there was reason for precipitancy more serious than the by-laws of the steamboat company.

"I am confident," I said, "that Selby-Harrison is capable of carrying on the work of exterminating bishops."

"It's not that either," said Lalage. "The fact is that we have come to Lisbon on business, not for pleasure. You've probably guessed that already."

"I feared it. Of the two reasons you gave me this morning for coming here----"

"I haven't told you any reason yet," said Lalage.

"Excuse me, but when we first met this morning you said distinctly that you had come to see me. I hardly flattered myself that could really be true."

"It was," said Lalage. "Quite true."

"It's very kind of you to say so and of course I quite believe you, but then you afterward gave me to understand that your real object was to work up the emotion caused by the appearance of a dead king with a view to utilizing it to add intensity to a prize poem. That, of course, is business of a very serious kind. That's why I meant to say a minute ago that of the two reasons you gave me for coming here the second was the more urgent."

"Don't ramble in that way," said Lalage. "It wastes time. Hilda, explain the scheme which we have in mind at present."

Hilda threw away the greater part of a cigarette and sat up in her beehive. I do not think that Hilda enjoys smoking cigarettes. She probably does it to impress the public with the genuine devotion to principle of the A.T.R.S.

"The society," said Hilda "has met with difficulties. Its objects----"

"He knows the objects," said Lalage. "Don't you?"

"To expose in the public press----" I began.

"That's just where we're stuck," said Lalage.

"Do you mean to tell me that the Irish newspapers have been so incredibly stupid as not to publish the articles sent by you, Hilda, and Selby-Harrison?"

"Not a single one of them," said Lalage.

"And the bishops," I said, "still wear their purple stocks, their aprons, and their gaiters; and still talk tommyrot through the length and breadth of the land."

"But we're not the least inclined to give in," said Lalage.

"Don't," I said. "Keep on pelting the editors with articles. Some day one of them will be away from home and an inexperienced subordinate----"

"That would be no use," said Hilda.

"What we have determined to do," said Lalage, "is to start a paper of our own."

"It ought," I said, "to be a huge success."

"I'm glad you agree with us there," said Lalage. "We've gone into the matter minutely. Selby-Harrison worked it out and we don't see how we could possibly make less than 12 per cent. Not that we want to make money out of it. Our efforts are purely--what's that word, Hilda? You found it in a book, but I always forget it."

"Altruistic," said Hilda.

"You understand that, I suppose?" said Lalage to me.

"Yes," I said, "I do. But I wasn't thinking of the financial side of the enterprise when I spoke of its being an immense success. What I had in mind----"

"Finance," said Lalage severely, "cannot possibly be ignored."

"All we want," said Hilda, "is some one to guarantee the working expenses for the first three months."

"And I said," added Lalage, "that you'd do it if we came out here and asked you."

I recollected hearing of an Englishman who started a daily paper which afterward failed and it was said that he lost PS300,000 by the venture. I hesitated.

"What we ask," said Lalage, "is not money, but a guarantee, and we are willing to pay 8 per cent, to whoever does it. The difference between a guarantee and actual money is that in the one case you will probably never have to pay at all, while in the other you will have to fork out at once."

"Am I," I asked, "to get 8 per cent, on what I don't give, but merely promise?"

"That's what it comes to," said Lalage. "I call it a good offer."

"It's one of the most generous I ever heard," I said. "May I ask if Selby-Harrison----?"

"It was his suggestion," said Hilda. "Neither Lalage nor I are any good at sums, specially decimals."

"And," said Lalage, "you'll get a copy of each number post free just the same as if you were a regular subscriber!"

"We've got one advertiser already," said Hilda.

"And," said Lalage, "advertisements pay the whole cost of newspapers nowadays. Any one who knows anything about the business side of the press knows that. Selby-Harrison met a man the other day who reports football matches and he said so."

"Is it cocoa," I asked, "or soap, or hair restorer?"

"No. It's a man who wants to buy second-hand feather beds. I can't imagine what he means to do with them when he gets them, but that's his business. We needn't worry ourselves so long as he pays us."

"Lalage," I said, "and Hilda, I am so thoroughly convinced of your energy and enterprise, I feel so sure of Selby-Harrison's financial ability and I am so deeply in sympathy with the objects of your, may I say our, society, that if I possessed PS300,000 you should have it to-morrow; but, owing to, recent legislation affecting Irish land, the ever-increasing burden of income tax and the death duties----"

"Don't start rambling again," said Lalage. "It isn't in the least funny, and we're both beginning to get sleepy. Nobody wants PS300,000."

"It takes that," I said, "to run a newspaper."

"What we want," said Lalage, "is thirty pounds, guaranteed--ten pounds a month for three months. All you have to do is to sign a paper----"

"Did Selby-Harrison draw up the paper?"

"Yes. And Hilda has it upstairs in her trunk."

"That's enough," I said. "Anything Selby-Harrison has drawn up I'll sign. Perhaps, Hilda, you'll be good enough--I wouldn't trouble you if I knew where to find it myself."

"Get it, Hilda," said Lalage.

Hilda struggled out of her beehive and immediately stumbled into a bed of stocks. It had become very dark while we talked, but I think the scent of the flowers might have warned her of her danger. I picked her up carefully and set her on the path.

"Perhaps," I said, "you won't mind taking off your shoes as you cross the hall outside the drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Dodds must have found out about Miss Battersby's bridge by this time."

I think Hilda winked. I did not actually see her wink. It was too dark to see anything; but there was a feeling in the air as if somebody winked and Lalage had nothing to wink about.

"If," I added, "they rush out and catch you, they will certainly ask you where I am. You must be prepared for that. Would you very much mind exaggerating a little, just for once?"

This time Hilda giggled audibly.

"You might say that Lalage and I had gone for a long walk and that you do not know when we will be back."

"That wouldn't be true," said Lalage, "so of course it can't be said."

"We can easily make it true," I said. "I don't want to go for a walk at this time of night and I'm sure you don't, after the exhausting day you've had--but rather than put Hilda in an awkward position and set her conscience gnawing at her during the night we might start at once, not telling Hilda when we'll be back."

"All right," said Lalage. "Pussy will fuss afterward of course. But----"

"I entirely forgot Miss Battersby," I said. "She would fuss to a certainty. She might write to the Archdeacon. After all, Hilda, you'll have to chance it with your shoes off. But for goodness' sake don't sneeze or fall or anything of that sort just outside the door."

Hilda returned in about ten minutes. She told us that she whistled "Annie Laurie" on her way upstairs so as to give any one who might hear her the impression that she was the boy employed by the hotel proprietor to clean boots. The ruse, a brilliantly original one, was entirely successful. The bridge party, as I learned next day, including Miss Battersby, had gone to bed early. They did not play very much bridge. Hilda brought Selby-Harrison's form of guarantee with her. It was written on a sheet of blue foolscap paper and ornamented with a penny stamp, necessary, so a footnote informed me, because the sum of money involved was more than two pounds. I signed it with a fountain pen by the light of a wax match which Lalage struck on the sole of her shoe and obligingly held so that it did not quite burn my hair.

CHAPTER VII

It is only very gradually that one comes to appreciate Lalage. I had known her since she was quite a small child. I even recollect her insisting upon my wheeling her perambulator once when I was a schoolboy, and naturally resented such an indignity. Yet I had failed to realize the earnestness and vigour of her character. I did not expect anything to come of the guarantee which I had signed for her. I might and ought to have known better; but I was in fact greatly surprised when I received by post the first copy of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette*. It was not a very large publication, but it contained more print than I should have thought obtainable for the sum of ten pounds. Besides the title of the magazine and a statement that this issue was Vol. I, No. I., there was a picture of a young lady, clothed like the goddess Diana in the illustrations of the classical dictionary, who was urging on several large dogs of most ferocious appearance. In the distance, evidently terrified by the dogs, were three animals of no recognized species, but very disgusting in appearance, which bore on their sides the words "Tommy Rot." The huntress was remarkably like Hilda in appearance and the initials "L.B." at the bottom left-hand corner of the picture told me that the artist was Lalage herself. One of the dogs was a highly idealized portrait of a curly haired retriever belonging to my mother. The objects of the chase I did not recognize as copies of any beasts known to me; though there was something in the attitude of the worst of them which reminded me slightly of the Archdeacon. I never heard what Hilda's mother thought of this picture. If she is the kind of woman I imagine her to be she probably resented the publication of a portrait of her daughter dressed in a single garment only and that decidedly shorter than an ordinary night dress.

Opening the magazine at page one, I came upon an editorial article. The rapid increase of the habit of talking tommyrot was dwelt upon and the necessity for prompt action was emphasized. The objects of the society were set forth with a naked directness, likely, I feared, to cause offence. Then came a paragraph, most disquieting to me, in which the generous gentleman whose aid had rendered the publication of the magazine possible was subjected to a good deal of praise. His name was not actually mentioned, but he was described as a distinguished diplomatist well known in an important continental court. This made me uneasy. There are not very many distinguished diplomatists who would finance a magazine of the kind. I felt that suspicion would fasten almost at once upon me, in the event of there being any kind of public inquiry. Next to the editorial article came a page devoted on one side entirely to the advertisement of the gentleman who wanted second-hand feather beds. The other side of it was announced as "To Let," and the attention of advertisers was called to the unique opportunity offered to them of making their wishes known to an intelligent and progressive public. After that came the bishops.

Each bishop had at least half a page to himself. Some had much more, the amount of space devoted to them being apparently regulated in accordance with the enormity of their offences. There was a note in italics at the end of each indictment which ran thus:

"All inquirers after the original sources of the information used in this article are requested to apply to J. Selby-Harrison, Esq., 175 Trinity College, Dublin, by whom the research in the columns of the daily papers has been conducted with much ability and disinterested discretion. P.S.--J. Selby-Harrison has in all cases preserved notes of the dates, etc., for purposes of verification." The working up of the material thus collected was without doubt done by Lalage. I recognized her style. Hilda probably corrected the proof.

In the letter which Lalage wrote to me at the time of the founding of the A.T.R.S. she spoke of university life as broadening the mind and enlarging the horizon. Either Oxford in this respect is inferior to Trinity College, Dublin, or else my mind has narrowed again since I took my degree and my horizon has shrunk. I did not feel that the episcopal pronouncements quoted deserved the eminence to which Lalage promoted them. They struck me as being simply commonplace. I had grown quite accustomed to them and had come to regard them as proper and natural things for bishops to say. For instance, the very first paragraph in this pillory of Lalage's was devoted to a bishop, I forget his name and territorial title, who had denounced Sir Walter Scott's "Ivanhoe." Some evil-minded person had put forward this novel as a suitable reading book for Irish boys and girls in secondary schools, and the bishop had objected strongly. Lalage was cheerfully contemptuous of him. Without myself sharing his feeling, I can quite understand that he may have found it his duty to protest against the deliberate encouragement of such dangerous reading; and it is seldom right to laugh at a man for doing his duty. I read "Ivanhoe" when I was a boy and I distinctly remember that at least one eminent ecclesiastic is presented in a most unfavourable light. If Irish boys and girls got into the way of thinking of twelfth-century priors as gay dogs, the step onward to actual disrespect for contemporary bishops would be quite a short one.

There was another bishop (he appeared a few pages further on in the *Gazette*) who objected to the education of boys and girls under seven years of age in the same infant schools. He said that this mixing of the sexes would destroy the beautiful modesty of demeanour which distinguishes Irish girls from those of other nations. Lalage poked fun at this man for a page and a half. I hesitate to say that she was actually wrong. My own experience of infant schools is very small. I once went into one, but I did not stay there for more than five minutes, hardly long enough to form an opinion about the wholesomeness of the moral atmosphere. But in this case again I can enter into the feelings of the

bishop. He probably knows, having once been six years old himself, that all boys of that age are horrid little beasts. He also knows--he distinctly says so in the pastoral quoted by Lalage--that the charm of maidenhood is a delicate thing, comparable to the bloom on a peach or the gloss on a butterfly's wings. Even Miss Battersby, who must know more about girls than any bishop, felt that Lalage had lost something not to be regained when she became intimate enough with Tom Kitterick to rub glycerine and cucumber into his cheeks.

Lalage was, in my opinion, herself guilty of something very like the sin of tommyrot when she mocked another bishop for a sermon he had preached on "Empire Day." He said that wherever the British flag flies there is liberty for subject peoples and several other obviously true things of the same kind. I do not see what else, under the circumstances, the poor man could say. Nor do I blame him in the least for boldly demanding more battleships to carry something--I think he said the Gospel--to still remoter lands. Lalage chose to pretend that liberty and subjection are contradictory terms, but this is plainly absurd. Lord Thormanby talked over this part of the *Gazette* with me some months later and gave it as his opinion that a man whom he knew in the club had put the case very well by saying that there are several quite distinct kinds of liberty.

I found myself still more puzzled by Lalage's attitude toward another man who was not even, strictly speaking, a bishop. He was a moderator, or an ex-moderator, of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. He had made a speech in which he set forth reasons why he and others like him should have a recognized place in the vice-regal court. I am not myself passionately fond of vice-regal courts, but I know that many people regard them with great reverence, and I do not see why a man should be laughed at for wanting to walk through the state rooms in Dublin Castle in front of somebody else. It is a harmless, perhaps a laudable, ambition. Lalage chose to see something funny in it, and I am bound to say that when I had finished her article I too began to catch a glimpse of the amusing side of it.

I spent a long time over the *Gazette*. The more I read it the greater my perplexity grew. Many things which I had accepted for years as solemn and necessary parts of the divine ordering of the world were suddenly seized, contorted, and made to grin like apes. I felt disquieted, inclined, and yet half afraid, to laugh. I was rendered acutely uncomfortable by an editorial note which followed the last jibe at the last bishop: "The next number of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* will deal with politicians and may be expected to be lively. Subscribe at once.--Ed."

I was so profoundly distrustful of my own judgment in delicate matters that I determined to find out if I could what Dodds thought of Lalage's opinions. Dodds is preeminently a man of the world, very sound, unemotional and full of common sense. I did not produce the *Gazette* or mention Lalage's name, for Dodds has had a prejudice against her since the evening on which he played bridge with Miss Battersby. Nor did I make a special business of asking his advice. I waited until we sat down to bridge together after dinner and then I put a few typical cases before him in casual tones, as if they were occurring to me at the moment.

"Dodds," I said, holding the cards in my hand, "supposing that a bishop for whom you always had a respect on account of the dignity of his office, were to say----"

"I wouldn't have any respect for a bishop on account of his office," said Dodds. "Why don't you deal?"

"We're Presbyterians," said Mrs. Dodds.

"That needn't prevent you considering this case, for the word bishop is here used--that is to say, I am using it--to mean any eminent ecclesiastic. All right, I'm dealing as fast as I can. Supposing that a man of that kind, call him a bishop or anything else you like, were to say that boys and girls ought not to read 'Ivanhoe' on account of the danger to their faith and morals contained in that book, would you or would you not say that he, the bishop, not 'Ivanhoe,' was talking what in ordinary slang is called tommyrot?"

I finished dealing and, after glancing rather inattentively at my cards, declared hearts.

Dodds, who was sitting on my left, picked up his hand and doubled my hearts. He did so in a tone that convinced me that I had been rash in my declaration. He paid no attention whatever to my question about the bishop and "Ivanhoe." It turned out that he had a remarkably good hand and he scored thirty-two below the line, which of course gave him the game. Mrs. Dodds, who was my partner, seemed temporarily soured, and while Dodds was explaining to us how well he had played, she took up the question about the bishop.

"I'd be thinking," she said, "that that bishop of yours had very little to do to be talking that way. I'd say he'd be the kind of man who'd declare hearts with no more than one honour on his hand and that the queen."

This rather nettled me, for I quite realized that my hand did not justify a heart declaration. I had made it inadvertently my mind being occupied with more important matters.

"Of course," I said, "you're prejudiced in favour of Sir Walter Scott. You Scotch are all the same. A word against Sir Walter or Robbie Burns is enough for you. But I'll put another case to you: Supposing a bishop--understanding the word as I've explained it--were to say that infant schools are a danger to public morality on account of the way that boys and girls are mixed up together in the same classrooms, would he, in your opinion----?"

Dodds has a horribly coarse mind. He stopped dealing and grinned. Then he winked at the young engineer who sat opposite to him. He, I was pleased to see, had the grace to look embarrassed. Mrs. Dodds, who of course knows how

her husband revels in anything which can be twisted into impropriety, interrupted me with a question asked in a very biting tone.

"Is it chess you think you are playing the now, or is it bridge?"

I had to let the next deal pass without any further attempt to discover Dodds's opinion about tommyrot. I was trying to think out what Mrs. Dodds meant by accusing me of wanting to play chess. It struck me as an entirely gratuitous and, using the word in its original sense, impertinent suggestion. Nothing I had said seemed in any way to imply that I was thinking of chess. As a matter of fact, I detest the game and never play it. I suppose I am slow-witted, but it did not occur to me for quite a long time, that, being a Scotch Presbyterian, the mention of bishops was more likely to call up to her mind the pieces which sidle obliquely across a chessboard than living men of lordly degree. I was not sure in the end that I had tracked her thought correctly, but I know that I made several bad mistakes during the next and the following hands.

When it worked round to my turn to deal again I gave out the cards very slowly and made another attempt to find out whether Dodds did or did not agree with Lalage about tommyrot.

"Supposing," I said, "that a clergyman, an ordinary clergyman, not a bishop, the kind of clergyman whom you would perhaps describe as a minister, were to preach a sermon about the British Empire and were to say----"

"In our church," said Mrs. Dodds snappily, "the ministers preach the Gospel."

"I am convinced of that," I said, "but you must surely admit that the great idea of the imperial expansion of the race, Greater Britain beyond the seas, and--the White Man's Burden, and all that kind of thing, are not essentially anti-evangelical, when looked at from the proper point of view. Suppose, for instance, that our hypothetical clergyman were to take for his text----"

I laid down the last card in the pack on my own pile and looked triumphantly at Dodds. I had, at all events, not made a misdeal. Dodds put his hand down on his cards with a bang. He has large red hands, which swell out between the knuckles and at the wrists. I saw by the way his fingers were spread on the table that he was going to speak strongly. I recollected then, when it was too late, that Dodds is an advanced Radical and absolutely hates the idea of imperialism. I tried to diminish his wrath by slipping in an apologetic explanation before he found words to express his feelings.

"The clergyman I mean," I said, "isn't--he's purely imaginary, but if he had any real existence he wouldn't belong to your church. He'd be a bishop."

"He'd better," said Dodds grimly.

I felt so much depressed that I declared spades at once. I gathered from the tone in which he spoke that if the clergyman who preached imperialism came within the jurisdiction of Dodds, or for the matter of that of Mrs. Dodds, it would be the worse for him. By far his best chance of a peaceful life was to be a bishop and not to live in Scotland. This was a great deal worse than Lalage's way of treating him. She merely sported, pursuing him with gay ridicule, mangling his pet quotations, smiling at his swelling rotundities. Dodds would have sent him to the stake without an opportunity for recantation.

I lost altogether seven shillings during the evening, which represents a considerable run of bad luck, for we never played for more than a shilling for each hundred points. Mrs. Dodds, of course, lost the same amount. I tried to make it up to her next day by sending her, anonymously, six pairs of gloves. She must have known that they came from me for she was very gracious and friendly next evening. But for a long time afterward Dodds used to annoy her by proposing to talk about bishops and infant schools whenever she happened to be my partner.

CHAPTER VIII

A week passed without my hearing anything from home about Lalage's *Gazette*. My mother's weekly letter--she wrote regularly every Sunday afternoon--contained nothing but the usual chronicle of minor events. I had no other regular correspondent. The Archdeacon had written me eleven letters since I left home, all of them dealing with church finance and asking for subscriptions. Canon Beresford never wrote to me at all. I was beginning to hope that the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* had failed to catch the eye--ought I to say the ear?--of the public. This would of course be a disappointment to Lalage, perhaps also to Hilda and Selby-Harrison, but it would be a great relief to me. The more I thought of it the more I disliked the idea of being identified with the generous gentleman whose timely aid had rendered the publication possible.

My hopes were shattered by the arrival of no less than six letters by one post. One of them was addressed in my mother's writing, and I feared the worst when I saw it. It was quite the wrong day for a letter from her, and I knew that nothing except a serious disaster would induce her to break through her regular rule of Sunday writing. Another of the letters came from the Archdeacon. I knew his hand. Two of the other envelopes bore handwritings which I did not recognize. The addresses of the remaining two were typewritten. I turned them all over thoughtfully and decided to open my mother's first. She made no attempt to soften the shock I suffered by breaking her news to me gradually.

"Lalage appears to have excelled herself in her latest escapade. I only heard about it this morning and have not had time to verify the details of the story; but I think it better to write to you at once in case you should hear an exaggerated version from some one else."

My mother is very thoughtful and kind; but in this particular case, needlessly so. I was not in the least likely to hear an exaggerated version of Lalage's performance from any source; because no one in the world, not even a politician, could exaggerate the truth about the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette*.

My mother went on:

"You appear to be mixed up in the affair, and, on the whole, I advise you to get out of it at once if you can. Your uncle, who takes these matters very seriously, is greatly annoyed. Lalage appears to have published something, a pamphlet probably, but report says variously a book, a magazine, and a newspaper. I have not seen a copy myself, though I telegraphed to Dublin for one as soon as the news of its publication reached me. Your uncle, who heard about it at the club, says it is scurrilous. He sent out for a copy, but was informed by the news agent that the whole issue was sold out. The Archdeacon was the first to tell me about it. He had been in Dublin attending a meeting of the Church Representative Body and he says that the general opinion there is that it is blasphemous. Even the Canon is a good deal upset and has gone away for a holiday to the north of Scotland. I had a postcard from him to-day with a picture of the town hall at Wick on the back of it. He wrote nothing except the words, 'Virtute mea me unvolvo.' I have Latin enough to guess that this--is it a quotation from his favourite Horace?--is a description of his own attitude toward Lalage's performance. Miss Pettigrew, who is greatly interested, and I think on the whole sympathetic with Lalage, writes that eighteen bishops have already begun actions for libel, and that three more are expected to do so as soon as they recover from fits of nervous prostration brought on by Lalage's attacks on them. A postscript to her letter gets nearer than anything else I have come across to giving a coherent account of what has actually taken place. 'Lalage,' she writes, 'has shown a positively diabolical ingenuity in picking out for the pillory all the most characteristically episcopal utterances for the last two years.' You will understand better than I do what this means."

I did understand what Miss Pettigrew meant, but I do not think that Lalage ought to be given: the whole credit. Selby-Harrison did the research.

My mother went on:

"Father Maconchy, the P.P., stopped me on the road this afternoon to say that he hoped there was no truth in the report that you are mixed up in what he calls a disgraceful attempt at proselytizing. The Archdeacon tells me that in ecclesiastical circles (his, not Father Maconchy's, ecclesiastical circles) you are credited with having urged Lalage on, and says he fears your reputation will suffer."

I put the letter down at this point and swore. Extreme stupidity always makes me swear. It is almost the only thing in the world which does. The Archdeacon, who has been acquainted with Lalage since her birth, ought to have more sense than to suppose, or allow any one else to suppose, that she ever required urging on. Even Father Maconchy's reading of the situation was intelligent compared to that.

"Miss Pettigrew says that the Trinity College authorities have taken the matter up and are strongly of opinion that you are financing the publication. Thormanby tells me that the same rumour is current in the club. He heard it from five or six different men, and says he has been written to about the matter since he came home by people who are most anxious about your connection with it. I do not know what to believe, and I do not want to press my opinion on you, but if, without making things worse for Lalage than they are at present, you can disclaim responsibility for the publication, whatever it is, it will probably be wise for you to do so."

It did not seem to me to matter, after reading what my mother said, which of the other letters I took next. I tried one of the two which bore typewritten addresses, in the hope that it might be nothing worse than a bill. It was, as a matter of fact, a statement of accounts. The first sheet ran thus:

*Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette Guarantee Fund
Trinity College, Dublin, No. 175, and at the rooms of the Elizabethan
Society*

*Debtor and Creditor Account
To 8 per cent, due on one third of PS80, being amount of
guarantee for one month as per agreement signed August 9th,
ult., equals 1s. 4d. (say, one shilling and fourpence).
Examined and found correct*

J. Selby-Harrison.

*Stamps (1s. 4d.) enclosed to balance account. Please
acknowledge receipt.*

It is very gratifying to a guarantor to receive interest on his promise in this prompt and business-like way, but I am not sure that 8 per cent, will be sufficient to compensate me for the trouble I shall have in explaining my position to the Board of Trinity College, the Representative Body of the Church of Ireland, the Standing Committee of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy, the Presbyterian General Assembly, and the committee of the Kildare Street Club. The next sheet of Selby-Harrison's accounts was equally business-like in form.

*Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette Guarantee Fund Trinity College,
Dublin, No. 175, and at the rooms of the Elizabethan Society
Per Contra.*

*By one third of PS30, being amount of guarantee for one month
as per agreement signed August 9th, ult., PS10, less payment
by advertiser for single insertion, being one twelfth of 75.
9d.f contract price for year, 7.75 pence equals PS9-19-4.25
(say nine pounds nineteen shillings and fourpence farthing)
now due by guarantor. Examined and found correct Kindly
remit at once to avoid legal proceedings.*

J. Selby-Harrison.

The last thing in the world I wanted was further legal proceedings. With eighteen libel actions pending and three more threatened in the near future, the Irish courts would be kept busy enough without being forced to deal with a writ issued by Selby-Harrison against me. I sat down at once and remitted, making out my cheque for the round sum of PS10, and telling Selby-Harrison that he could set the extra 7.75 pence against postage and petty cash. I pointed out at the same time that the advertiser, considering the unexpectedly wide publicity which had been given to his desire for second-hand feather beds, had got off ridiculously cheap. I suggested that he might, if approached, agree to pay the extra.25 of a penny.

I turned over the other three envelopes and chose for my next experiment one addressed in a delicate female hand. It seemed to me scarcely possible that letters formed as these were could convey sentiments of any but a fragrant kind. I turned out to be mistaken. This letter was more pitiless even than Selby-Harrison's stark mathematical statements.

"Owing to the incessant worry and annoyance of the last three days I am prostrate with a bad attack of my old enemy and am obliged to dictate this letter."

The signature, written with evident pain, told me that the dictator was my Uncle Thormanby. The "old enemy" was, as I knew, gout.

"Miss Battersby is acting as my amanuensis."

For the fifth or sixth time in my life I felt sorry for Miss Battersby.

"Canon Beresford's girl has libelled eighty or ninety bishops in the most outrageous way. I am not sure of the law, but I sincerely hope that it may be found possible to send her to gaol with hard labour for a term of years. Not that I care what she says about bishops. They probably deserve all they get and in any case it's no business of mine. What annoys me is that she has mixed you up in the scandal. Old Tollerton was sniggering about the club in the most disgusting way the day before yesterday, and telling every one that you were financing the minx. He says he has it on the best authority.

"I found a letter waiting for me when I came home from the secretary of the Conservative and Unionist Parliamentary Association, asking me if the rumour was true. I had just arranged with them to put you up for the East Connor division of Down at the general election and everything was looking rosy. Then this confounded stinkpot of a bombshell burst in our midst. That outrageous brat of Beresford's ought to be soundly whipped. I always said so and it turns out now that I was perfectly right.

"I need scarcely tell you that if your name is connected with these libel actions in any way your chance of election won't be worth two pence. The Nationalist blackguards would make the most of it, of course, and I don't see how our people could defend you without bringing the parsons and Presbyterian ministers out like wasps.

"I have authoritatively denied that you have, or ever had, any connection with or knowledge of the scurrilous print; so I beg that you will at once withdraw the guarantee which I understand you have given. If you don't do this my position, as well as your own, will be infernally awkward. I wanted to get a hold of Beresford to-day, but hear that he has gone to Iceland. Just like him I thought I might have bullied him into taking the responsibility and clearing you. The Archdeacon won't. I tried him. Tollerton, who insisted on sitting next me at luncheon in the club, says that you may be able to hush the thing up by offering to build a new church for each of the bishops named. This would cost thousands and cripple you for the rest of your life, so we won't make any overtures in that direction till everything else fails. Tollerton always makes the worst of everything. They say he has Bright's disease. I shan't be sorry when he's gone; but if I have to go through much more worry of this kind it's likely enough that he'll see me out."

With this letter was enclosed a small slip of paper bearing a message which appeared to have been very hurriedly written.

"Please do not be too angry with Lalage. I'm sure she did not mean any harm. She is a very high-spirited girl, but most affectionate. I'm so sorry about it all especially for your poor mother.

"Amelie Battersby."

Miss Battersby need not have made her appeal. Even if I had been very angry with Lalage my uncle's letter would have softened my heart toward her. She deserved well and not ill of me. The decision of the Conservative and Unionist Parliamentary Association came on me as a shock. I had no idea that my uncle was negotiating with them on my behalf. If Lalage's *Gazette* disgusted them with me and made it obvious that I could not succeed as a candidate in the East Connor Division of County Down I should be greatly pleased, and my ten pounds, or whatever larger sum might be required to pacify the fiercest of the bishops, would be very well spent.

I opened the Archdeacon's letter next. It was, with the exception of Selby-Harrison's, the shortest of the whole batch.

"I write, not in anger but in sorrow. Lalage, whom I can only think of as a dear but misguided child, has been led away by the influence of undesirable companions into a grievous mistake. I shrink from applying a severer word. As a man of the world I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that the money, the considerable sum of money, which you have placed at the disposal of these young people has proved a temptation, not to Lalage, but to those with whom she has unfortunately associated herself. In the event of your deciding, as I strongly urge you to do, to withdraw your financial guarantee, these unscrupulous persons, seeing no prospect of further profit, will no doubt cease to lead Lalage astray."

The idea in the Archdeacon's mind evidently was that Selby-Harrison and Hilda had exploited Lalage, and obtained the money for unhallowed revellings, from me. I should like to hear Hilda's mother's opinion of the Archdeacon's view. Its injustice was of course quite evident to me. I had Selby-Harrison's accounts before me, and nothing could be clearer than they were. Besides I knew from my mother's letter that what the Archdeacon now said about Selby-Harrison and Hilda he had originally said about me. When the truth, the whole truth, about the publication of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* is published, it will be recognized that Selby-Harrison, Hilda, and I, so far from urging Lalage on or leading her astray, were from first to last little more than tools for her use, clay in her potter's hands.

My fifth letter turned out to be from the Provost of Trinity College. It was written in very courteous terms and was, on the whole, the most encouraging I had yet read.

He wrote:

"You must forgive my meddling in your affairs, and accept the fact that I am, in some sense, an old family friend, as my excuse for offering you a word of advice. I knew your father before you were born, and as a young man I often dined at your grandfather's table. This gives me a kind of right to make a suggestion which I have no doubt you will take in good part. Three young people, who as students in this college are more or less under my charge, have got into a scrape which might very well be serious but which, I hope, will turn out in the end to be merely ridiculous. They have printed and published a small magazine in which no less than twenty-one of the Irish bishops are fiercely attacked.

"It is only fair to say that they have been actuated by no sectarian spirit. They are equally severe on Protestant and Roman Catholic ecclesiastics. The publication was at once brought under my notice, and I could do nothing else but send for the delinquents. Nothing could have been more praiseworthy than their candour. They gave me an account of the purpose of their society--they have formed a society--which showed that their objects were not in any way vicious, although the means they adopted for furthering them were highly culpable. I spoke to them strongly, very strongly indeed, and I trust made some impression on them. At the same time I must confess that one of them, Miss Lalage Beresford, displayed the greatest determination and absolutely declined to give me a promise that the publication of the magazine would be discontinued, except on conditions which I could not possibly consider. You will recognize at

once that for Miss Lalage's own sake, as well as for the sake of college discipline, I cannot have any further publication of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette*.

"At the same time I am unwilling to proceed to extremities against her or either of the others. They are all young and will learn sense in due time. It occurs to me that perhaps the simplest way out of the difficulty will be for you to withdraw the guarantee of financial assistance which, as I understand, you have given. If you are prepared to support me in this way I may safely promise that no further notice of the absurd publication will be taken by the college authorities. There are rumours of libel actions pending, but I think we may disregard them. No damages can be obtained from you beyond the amount of your original guarantee, which, I understand, did not amount to more than PS30. All the other defendants are minors, dependent entirely on their parents for their support, so the aggrieved parties will probably not proceed far with their action. If you agree to stop supplies and so prevent the possibility of further publication, I shall use my influence to have the whole affair hushed up."

There remained only the fifth letter; the second of those which bore a typewritten address. I opened it and found that it came from Lalage. She wrote:

"We have only been able, to hire this typewriter for one week so I'm practising hard at it. That is why I'm typing this letter. Please excuse mistakes."

There were a good many mistakes but I excused them.

"Your copy of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* went to you first thing. Hilda nearly forgot to post it, but didn't quite, which was lucky, for all the rest were seized from us, except nine, which Selby-Harrison gave to a news agent, who sold them but didn't pay us, though he may yet. Hard Luck, I call that. Don't you? Some ass sent a copy, marked, to the Prov. and the next thing we knew was that both offices were raided by college porters and our property stolen by force. We were furious, but before we could take any action--we were going to consult a lawyer, a K.C., whose son happens to be a friend of Selby-Harrison's on account of being captain of Trinity 3rd A (hockey), in which Selby-Harrison plays halfback--our doom was upon us and Selby-Harrison was sent for by the Prov. He came back shattered, like that telescope man who got caught by the Inquisition, having spent hours on the rack and nearly had his face eaten off as well. Our turn came next. We (Hilda and I) had just time to dart off on top of a tram to Trinity Hall (that's where we have our rooms), you know, of course, and jump into our best frocks before 1 P.M., the hour of our summons to the august presence. Hilda's is a tussore silk, frightfully sweet, and I had a blouse with a lot of Carrickmacross lace on it.

"Hilda was in a pea-blue funk when it came to the moment and kept pulling at her left glove until she tore the button off. I was a bit jellyfishy myself down the back; but I needn't have been. The minute I got into the room I could see that the old Prov. was a perfect pet and didn't really mean anything, though he tried to look as if he did."

I have always disliked the modern system of co-education and after reading Lalage's letter I was strongly inclined to agree with the bishop who wants to stamp it out, beginning with the infant schools. I do not agree with his reasoning. My objection--it applies particularly to the admission of grown-up young women to universities--is that even-handed justice is never administered. The girls get off cheap. Some day, perhaps, we shall have a lady presiding as provost over one of our great universities. Then the inequalities of our present arrangements will be balanced by others. The Lalages and Hildas of those days will spend hours upon the rack. If they are fools enough to jump into tussore frocks and blouses with Carrickmacross lace on them before being admitted to the august presence, they will have their faces eaten off as well. On the other hand, the Selby-Harrisons, if reasonably good-looking young men, will find the Prov. a perfect pet, who doesn't really mean anything; who, perhaps, will not even try to look as if she does.

"He jawed a lot, of course, but we did not mind that a bit; at least I didn't, for I knew he only did it because he had to. In the end he asked us to promise not to annoy bishops any more. Hilda promised. Rather base of her, I call it; but by that time she had dragged the second button off her glove and would have promised simply anything. I stuck on and said I wouldn't. He seemed a bit put out, and he'd been such a dear about the whole thing that I hated having to refuse him. You know the sort of way you feel when somebody, that you want frightfully to do things for, will clamour on for what you know is wrong. That's the way I was and at last I couldn't stand it any more, so I said I'd promise on condition that the bishops all undertook not to say any more silly things except in church. That was as far as I could well go and I thought the Prov. would have jumped at the offer. Instead of which he first scowled in a very peculiar way and then his face all wrinkled up and got quite red so that I thought he was going to get some kind of fit. Without saying another word he in a sort of way hustled us out of the room. That was the only really rude thing he did to us; but Selby-Harrison sticks to it that he was perfectly awful to him. We don't quite know what will happen next, but both the other two think that we'd better not have the college porters arrested for stealing the magazines. I'd like to, but, of course, they are two to one. Selby-Harrison is looking like a sick turkey and is constantly sighing. He says he thinks he'll have to be a doctor now. He had meant to go into the Divinity School and be ordained but after what the Provost said to him he doesn't see how he can. Rather rough luck on him, having to fall back on the medical; but I don't think he'll mind much in the end, except that he doubts whether his father can afford the fees. That will be a difficulty, if true."

I wonder what the fees amount to. I am inclined to think that it is my duty to see Selby-Harrison through. I should not like to think of his whole career being wrecked. At the same time I am inclined to think that it would be waste to turn

him into a doctor. He ought to make his mark as a chartered accountant if he gets a chance. I shall speak to my mother about him when I go home and see what she suggests.

"Hilda's mother has written saying that Hilda is not to spend next hols with me; which was all arranged before the fuss began. I can't see what objection she can possibly have. Anyhow it is frightful tyranny and of course we don't mean to stand it. Selby-Harrison says that perhaps if you wrote to her she would give in; but I don't want you to do this. I hate crawling, especially to Hilda's mother and people like that, but if you like to do it you can. Selby-Harrison says that your mother being an honourable, will make a lot of difference, though I don't see what that has to do with me. Still if you think it will be any use there's no reason why you shouldn't mention it. Hilda has cried buckets full since the letter came."

I am sorry for Hilda but I shall not write to her mother. I have enough on my hands without that. Besides, as Lalage says, I do not see the connection between my mother's position in society and Hilda's mother's schemes for her daughter's holidays.

"P.S. I hope you got your 8 per cent, all right. I told Selby-Harrison to send it. We were all three stony at the time and had to borrow it from another girl who is going in for logic honours, but she's quite rich, so it doesn't matter. Hilda didn't want to, and said she'd give her two gold safety pins, which she got last Christmas, if Selby-Harrison would pawn them for her. But he wouldn't, and I thought it was hardly worth while for the sake of one and fourpence, besides making her mother more furious than ever. We ought not to have had to borrow more than fourpence, for Selby-Harrison had a shilling the night before, but went and spent it on having a Turkish bath. Rather a rotten thing to do, I think, when we owed it. But he said he'd forgotten about the 8 per cent, and had to have the Turkish bath on account of the way the Prov. talked to him. That was yesterday, of course, not to-day."

I was glad when I read this that I had made out my cheque for the whole ten pounds. Selby-Harrison will be in a position to pay the other girl back. She may be quite rich, but she will not like being done out of her money. The fact that she is going in for logic honours shows me that she has a precise kind of mind and a good deal of quiet determination. I should be surprised if she submitted meekly to the loss of one and fourpence.

"P.P.S. I always forget to tell you that Pussy (Miss Battersby) says she left a hat pin with a silver swallow on the end of it in that first hotel in Lisbon. Would you mind going in the next day you are passing and asking for it? I hate to bother you and I wouldn't, only that we don't any of us remember the name of the hotel and so can't write."

I rather shrank from asking that hotel keeper for a pin supposed to have been dropped in one of his bedrooms during the previous August. But Miss Battersby, at least, does not deserve to suffer. I spent a long afternoon going round the jewellers' shops in Lisbon and in the end secured a pin with two silver doves and a heart on it. I sent this to Miss Battersby and explained that it was the nearest thing to her original swallow which the hotel keeper had been able to find. She is, fortunately, quite an easy person to please. She wrote thanking me for the trouble I had taken.

CHAPTER IX

My friends were singularly successful in their negotiations on my behalf. Not a single bishop proceeded with his libel action against Lalage. Nor was I forced to buy any of them off by building even a small cathedral. I attribute our escape from their vengeance entirely to the Provost. His clear statement of the impossibility of obtaining damages by any legal process must have had its effect.

Gossip too died away with remarkable suddenness. I heard afterward that old Tollerton got rapidly worse and succumbed to his disease, whatever it was, very shortly after his last interview with my uncle. I have no doubt that his death had a good deal to do with the decay of public interest in the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette*. The Archdeacon, who also was inclined to talk a good deal, had his mind distracted by other events. The bishop of our diocese had a paralytic stroke. He was not one of those whom Lalage libelled, so the blame for his misfortune cannot be laid on us. The Archdeacon was, in consequence, very fully occupied in the management of diocesan affairs and forgot all about the *Gazette*. Canon Beresford ventured back to his parish after a stay of six weeks in Wick. He would not have dared to return if there had been the slightest chance of the Archdeacon's reverting to the painful subject in conversation. Had there been even the slightest reference to it in the newspapers, Canon Beresford, instead of returning home, would have gone farther afield to an Orkney Island or the Shetland group, or, perhaps, to one of those called Faroe, which do not appear on ordinary maps but are believed by geographers to exist. Thus when my mother, in the course of one of her letters, mentioned casually that Canon Beresford had lunched with her, I knew, as Noah did when the dove no longer returned to him, that the flood had abated.

My uncle was also successful, too successful, in his effort. His definite denial of my connection with the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* obtained credence with the Committee of the Conservative and Unionist Parliamentary Association. My name retained its place on their books and they continued to put me forward as a candidate for the East Connor division of Down at the General Election.

I only found this fact out by degrees, for nobody seemed to think it worth while to tell me. My uncle said afterward that my ignorance, in which he found it very difficult to believe, was entirely my own fault. I cannot deny this: though I still hold that I ought to have been plainly informed of my destiny and not left to infer it from the figures in the accounts which were sent to me from time to time. When I went to Portugal I left my money affairs very much in the hands of my mother and my uncle. I had what I wanted. They spent what they thought right in the management of my estate, in subscriptions and so forth. The accounts which they sent me, very different indeed from the spirited statements of Selby-Harrison, bored me, and I did not realize for some time that I was subscribing handsomely to a large number of local objects in places of which I had never even heard the names. I now know that they are towns and villages in the East Connor division of Down, and my uncle has told me that this kind of expenditure is called nursing the constituency.

The first definite news of my candidature came to me, curiously enough, from Lalage. She wrote me a letter during the Christmas holidays:

"There was a party (flappers, with dancing and a sit-down supper, not a Christmas tree) at Thormanby Park last night. I got a bit fed up with 'the dear girls' (Cattersby's expression) at about nine o'clock and slipped off with Hilda in hope of a cigarette. (Hilda's mother's cook got scarlatina, so she had to give in about Hilda coming here for the hols after all. Rather a climb down for her, I should say.) It was jolly lucky we did, as it turned out, though we didn't succeed in getting the whiff. Lord Thormanby and the Archdeacon were in the smoking room, so we pretended we'd come to look for Hilda's pocket snuffler. The Archdeacon came to the party with a niece, in a green dress, who's over from London, and stiff with swank, though what about I don't know, for she can't play hockey a bit, has only read the most rotten books, and isn't much to look at, though the green dress is rather sweet, with a lace yoke and sequins on the skirt. Why didn't you tell me you were going into Parliament? I'm frightfully keen on elections and mean to go and help you. So does Hilda now that she knows about it, and I wrote to Selby-Harrison this morning. We've changed the name of the society to the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying (A.S.P.L.). Rather appropriate, isn't it, with a general election just coming on? Of course you're still a life member. The change of name isn't a constitutional alteration. Selby-Harrison made sure of that before we did it, so it doesn't break up the continuity, which is most important for us all. Lord Thormanby and the Archdeacon were jawing away like anything while we were searching about for the hanker, and took no notice of us, although the Archdeacon is frightfully polite now as a rule, quite different from what he used to be. They said the election was a soft thing for you unless somebody went and put up a third man. I rather hope they will, don't you? Dead certs are so rottenly unsporting. I'll have a meeting of the committee as soon as I get back to Dublin. This will be just the chance we want, for we haven't had any sort of a look in since they suppressed the *Gazette*."

I put this letter of Lalage's aside and did not answer it for some time. I thought that she and Hilda might have misunderstood what my uncle and the Archdeacon were saying. I did not regard it as possible that an important matter of the kind should be settled without my knowing anything about it; and I expected that Lalage would find out her

mistake for herself. It turned out in the end that she had not made a mistake. Early in January I got three letters, all marked urgent. One was from my uncle, one from the secretary of the Conservative and Unionist Association and one from a Mr. Titherington, who seemed to be a person of some importance in the East Connor division of County Down. They all three told me the same news. I had been unanimously chosen by the local association as Conservative candidate at the forthcoming general election. They all insisted that I should go home at once. I did so, but before starting I answered Lalage's letter. I foresaw that the active assistance of the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying in the campaign before me might have very complicated results, and would almost certainly bring on worry. The local conservative association, for instance, might not care for Lalage. Hardly any local conservative association would. Mr. Titherington might not hit it off with Selby-Harrison, and I realized from the way he wrote, that Mr. Titherington was a man of strong character. I worded my letter to Lalage very carefully. I did not want to hurt her feelings by refusing an offer which was kindly meant.

I wrote,

"I need scarcely tell you, how gladly I should welcome the assistance offered by the A.S.P.L., if I had nothing but my own feelings to consider. Speeches from you and Hilda would brighten up what threatens to be a dull affair. Selby-Harrison's advice would be invaluable. But I cannot, in fairness to others, accept the offer unconditionally. Selby-Harrison's father ought to be consulted. He has already been put to great expense through his son's expulsion from the Divinity School, and I would not like, now that he has, I suppose, paid some, at least, of the fees for medical training, to put him to fresh expense by involving his son in an enterprise which may very well result in his being driven from the dissecting room. Then we must think of Hilda's mother. If she insisted on Miss Battersby accompanying her daughter to Portugal in the capacity of chaperon, she is almost certain to have prejudices against electioneering as a sport for young girls.

"Perhaps circumstances have altered since I last heard from you in such a way as to make the consultations I suggest unnecessary. Mr. Selby-Harrison senior and Hilda's mother may both have died, prematurely worn out by great anxiety. In that case I do not press for any consideration of their wishes. But if they still linger on I should particularly wish to obtain their approval before definitely accepting the offer of the A.S.P.L."

I thought that a good letter. It was possible that Mr. Selby-Harrison had died, but I felt sure, judging from what I had heard of her, that Hilda's mother was a woman of vigour and determination who would live as long as was humanly possible. I was not even slightly disquieted by a telegram handed to me just before I left Lisbon.

"Letter received. Scruples strictly respected. Other arrangements in contemplation.

"Lalage."

I forgot all about the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying and its offer of help when I arrived in Ireland. Mr. Titherington came up to Dublin to meet me and showed every sign of keeping me very busy indeed. He turned out to be a timber merchant by profession, who organized elections by way of recreation whenever opportunity offered. I was told in the office of the Conservative and Unionist Association that no man living was more crafty in electioneering than Mr. Titherington, and that I should do well to trust myself entirely to his guidance. I made up my mind to do so. My uncle who also met me in Dublin, had been making inquiries of his own about Mr. Titherington and gave me the results of them in series of phrases which, I felt sure, he had picked up from somebody else. "Titherington," he said, "has his finger on the pulse of the constituency." "There isn't a trick of the trade but Titherington is thoroughly up to it." "For taking the wind out of the sails of the other side Titherington is absolutely A1." All this confirmed me in my determination to follow Mr. Titherington, blindfold.

The first time I met him he told me that we were going to have a sharp contest and gave me the impression that he was greatly pleased. A third candidate had taken the field, a man in himself despicable, whose election was an impossibility; but capable perhaps of detaching from me a number of votes sufficient to put the Nationalist in the majority.

"And O'Donoghue, let me tell you," said Titherington, "is a smart man and a right good speaker."

"I'm not," I said.

"I can see that."

I do not profess to know how he saw it. So far as I know, inability to make speeches does not show on a man's face, and Titherington had no other means of judging at that time except the appearance of my face. No one in fact, not even my mother, could have been sure then that I was a bad speaker. I had never spoken at a public meeting.

"But," said Titherington, "we'll pull you through all right. That blackguard Vittie can't poll more than a couple of hundred."

"Vittie," I said "is, I suppose, the tertium quid, not the Nationalist. I'm sorry to trouble you with inquiries of this kind, but in case of accident it's better for me to know exactly who my opponents are."

"He calls himself a Liberal. He's going baldheaded for some temperance fad and is backed by a score or so of Presbyterian ministers. We'll have to call canny about temperance."

"If you want me to wear any kind of glass button on the lapel of my coat, I'll do it; but I'm not going to sign a total abstinence pledge. I'd rather not be elected."

Titherington was himself drinking whiskey and water while we talked. He grinned broadly and I felt reassured. We had dined together in my hotel, and Titherington had consumed the greater part of a bottle of champagne, a glass of port, and a liqueur with his coffee. It was after dinner that he demanded whiskey and water. It seemed unlikely that he would ask me even to wear a button.

"As we're on the subject of temperance," he said, "you may as well sign a couple of letters. I have them ready for you and I can post them as I go home to-night." He picked up a despatch box which he had brought with him and kept beside him during dinner. It gave me a shock to see the box opened. It actually overflowed with papers and I felt sure that they all concerned my election. Titherington tossed several bundles of them aside, and came at last upon a small parcel kept together by an elastic band.

"This," he said, handing me a long typewritten document, "is from the Amalgamated Association of Licensed Publicans. You needn't read it. It simply asks you to pledge yourself to oppose all legislation calculated to injure the trade. This is your answer."

He handed me another typewritten document.

"Shall I read it?" I asked.

"You needn't unless you like. All I require is your signature."

I have learned caution in the diplomatic service. I read my letter before signing it, although I intended to sign it whatever it might commit me to. I had promised my uncle and given the Conservative and Unionist Parliamentary Association to understand that I would place myself unreservedly in Titherington's hands.

"I see," I said, "that I pledge myself----"

"You give the Amalgamated Association to understand that you pledge yourself," said Titherington.

"The same thing, I suppose?"

"Not quite," said Titherington grinning again.

"Anyhow," I said, "it's the proper thing, the usual thing to do?"

"O'Donoghue has done it, and I expect that ruffian Vittie will have to in the end, little as he'll like it."

I signed.

"Here," said Titherington, "is the letter of the joint committee of the Temperance Societies."

"There appear to be twenty-three of them," I said, glancing at the signatures.

"There are; and if there were only ten voters in each it would be more than we could afford to lose. Vittie thinks he has them all safe in his breeches pocket, but I have a letter here which will put his hair out of curl for a while."

"I hate men with curly hair," I said. "It's so effeminate."

Titherington seemed to think this remark foolish, though I meant it as an additional evidence of my determination to oppose Vittie to the last.

"Read the letter," he said.

I read it. If such a thing had been physically possible it would have put my hair into curl. It did, I feel almost certain, make it rise up and stand on end.

"I see by this letter," I said, "that I am pledging myself to support some very radical temperance legislation."

"You're giving them to understand that you pledge yourself. There's a difference, as I told you before."

"I may find myself in rather an awkward position if----"

"You'll, be in a much awkwarder one if Vittie gets those votes and lets O'Donoghue in!"

Titherington spoke in such a determined tone that I signed the letter at once.

"Is there anything else?" I asked. "Now that I am pledging myself in this wholesale way there's no particular reason why I shouldn't go on."

Titherington shuffled his papers about.

"Most of the rest of them," he said, "are just the ordinary things. We needn't worry about them. There's only one other letter--ah! here it is. By the way, have you any opinions about woman's suffrage?"

"Not one," I said, "but I don't, of course, want to be ragged if it can be avoided. Shall I pledge myself to get votes for all the unmarried women in the constituency, or ought I to go further?"

Titherington looked at me severely. Then he said:

"It won't do us any harm if Vittie is made to smell hell by a few militant Suffragettes."

"After the hole he's put us in about temperance," I said, "he'll deserve the worst they can do to him."

"In any ordinary case I'd hesitate; for women are a nuisance, a d---d nuisance. But this is going to be such an infernally near thing that I'm half inclined--- It's nuts and apples to them to get their knives into any one calling himself a Liberal, which shows they have some sense. Besides, the offer has, so to speak, dropped right into our mouths. It would be sinning against our mercies and flying in the face of Providence not to consider it."

I had, up to that moment, no reason for suspecting Titherington of any exaggerated respect for Providence. But there are queer veins of religious feeling in the most hard-headed men. I saw that Titherington had a theological side to his character and I respected him all the more for it.

"Here's a letter," he said, "from one of the suffrage societies, offering to send down speakers to help us. As I said before, women are a nuisance, but it's just possible that there may be a few cranks among that temperance lot. You'll notice that if a man has one fad he generally runs to a dozen, and there may be a few who really want women to get votes. We can't afford to chuck away any chances. If I could get deputations from the Anti-Vaccinationists and the Anti-Gamblers I would. But I'd be afraid of their going back on us and supporting Vittie. Anyhow, if these women are the right sort they'll pursue Vittie round and round the constituency and yell at him every time he opens his mouth."

I took the letter from Titherington. It was headed A.S.P.L. and signed Lalage Beresford.

"Are you quite sure," I said, "that the A.S.P.L. is a woman's suffrage society?"

"It must be," said Titherington. "The letter's signed by a woman, at least I suppose Lalage is a woman's name. It certainly isn't a man's."

"Still---"

"And what the devil would women be writing to us for if they weren't Suffragettes?"

"But A.S.P.L. doesn't stand for---"

"It must," said Titherington. "S stands for Suffrage, doesn't it? The rest is some fancy conglomeration. I tell you that there are so many of these societies nowadays that it's pretty hard for a new one to find a name at all."

"All the same---"

"There's no use arguing about their name. The question we have to decide is whether it's worth our while importing Suffragettes into the constituency or not."

If Titherington had not interrupted me so often and if he had not displayed such complete self-confidence I should have told him what the A.S.P.L. really was and warned him to be very careful about enlisting Lalage's aid. But I was nettled by his manner and felt that it would be very good for him to find out his mistake for himself. I remained silent.

"I think the best thing I can do," he said, "is to interview the lady. I can judge then whether she's likely to be any use to us."

I felt very pleased to think that Titherington would learn his mistake from Lalage herself. He will be much less arrogant afterward.

"If she is simply an old frump with a bee in her bonnet," he said, "who wants to bore people, I'll head her off at once. If she's a sporting sort of girl who'll take on Vittie at his own meetings and make things hum generally, I think I'll engage her and her lot. I don't happen to be a magistrate myself, but most of them are your supporters. There won't be a bit of use his trying to have her up for rioting. We'll simply laugh at him and she'll be worse afterward. Let me see now. She's in Dublin. 'Trinity Hall,' whatever that is. If I write to-night she'll get the letter in the morning. Suppose I say 11 a.m."

"I should rather like to be present at the interview," I said.

"You needn't trouble yourself. I sha'n't commit you to anything and the whole thing will be verbal. There won't be a scrap of paper for her to show afterward, even if she turns nasty."

It seemed to me likely that there would be paper to show afterward. If Lalage has Selby-Harrison behind her she will go to that interview with an agreement in her pocket ready for signature.

"All the same," I said, "I'd like to be there simply out of curiosity."

Titherington shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said, "but let me do the talking. I don't want you to get yourself tied up in some impossible knot. You'd far better leave it to me."

I assured him that I did not in the least want to talk, but I persisted in my determination to be present at the interview. Titherington had bullied me enough for one evening and my promise to put myself entirely in his hands was never meant to extend to the limiting of my intercourse with Lalage. Besides, I enjoyed the prospect of seeing him tied up in some impossible knot, and I believed that Lalage was just the girl to tie him.

CHAPTER X

Titherington had a room, temporarily set apart for his use as an office, in the house of the Conservative and Unionist Parliamentary Association. Here he was at liberty to spread about on a large table all the papers he carried in his despatch box and many others. The profusion was most impressive, and would, I am sure, have struck a chill into the soul of Vittie had he seen it. Here were composed and written the letters which I afterward signed, wonderful letters, which like the witches in Macbeth "paltered in a double sense." Here Titherington entered into agreements with bill printers and poster artists, for my election was to be conducted on the best possible system with all the modern improvements, an object lesson to the rest of Ireland. Here also the interview with Lalage took place. The room was a great convenience to us. Our proper headquarters were, of course, in Ballygore, the principal town in the East Connor division of Down. But a great deal of business had to be done in Dublin and we could hardly have got on without an office.

I walked into this room a few minutes before eleven on the morning after I had entertained Titherington in my hotel.

"The lady hasn't arrived yet," I said.

"She's gone," said Titherington. "She was here at half-past eight o'clock."

I noticed that Titherington spoke in a subdued way and that his eyes had a furtive expression I had never seen in them before. I felt encouraged to give expression to the annoyance which I felt. I told Titherington plainly that I thought he ought not to have changed the hour of the interview without telling me. It seemed to me that he had played me a mean trick and I resented it. Greatly to my surprise Titherington apologized meekly.

"It wasn't my fault," he said, "and I hadn't time to communicate with you. I only got this at twenty minutes past eight and had no more than time to get here myself."

He handed me a telegram.

"Eleven quite impossible. Say 8.30. Jun. Soph. Ord. begins at 9.30. Lalage Beresford."

"I was just sitting down to breakfast," said Titherington, "and I had to get up without swallowing so much as a cup of tea and hop on to a car. She's a tremendously prompt young woman."

"She is," I said, "and always was."

"You know her then?"

"I've known her slightly since she was quite a little girl."

"Why didn't you tell me so last night?"

"I tried to," I said, "but you kept on interrupting me, so I gave up."

Titherington's conscience may have pricked him. He was certainly in a chastened mood, but he showed no sign of wishing to make any further apologies. On the contrary he began to recover something of his habitual self-assertiveness.

"If you know her," he said, "perhaps you can tell me what a Jun. Soph. Ord. is?"

"No, I can't. She was always, even as a child, fond of using contractions. I remember her writing to me about a 'comp.' and she habitually used 'hols' and 'rec.' for holidays and recreation."

"It sounds to me," said Titherington, "like a police court."

"You don't mean to say that you think she's been arrested for anything?"

"I hope so."

"Why?" I asked. "Was she too much for you this morning?"

Titherington ignored the second question.

"I hope so," he said, "because if she's the sort of girl who gets arrested, she'll be most useful to us. She was quite on for annoying Vittie. She says she's been looking up his speeches and that he's one of the worst liars she ever came across. She's quite right there."

"I wish," I said, "that you'd go and bail her out. Her father's a clergyman and it will be a horrible thing if there's any public scandal."

"I hinted at that as delicately as I could. I didn't actually mention bail, because I wasn't quite sure that a Jun. Soph. Ord. mightn't be something in the Probate and Divorce Court. She simply laughed at me and said she didn't want any help. She told me that she and Hilda, whoever Hilda is, are sure to be all right, because the Puffin is always a lamb--I suppose the Puffin is some name they have for the magistrate--but that a Miss Harrison would probably be stuck."

"She can't have said Miss Harrison."

"No. She said Selly, or Selby-Harrison, short for Selina I thought."

"As a matter of fact, Selby-Harrison--it's a hyphenated surname--is a man."

"Oh, is it?" said Titherington, using the neuter pronoun because, I suppose, he was still uncertain about Selby-Harrison's sex.

"I wish," I said, "that I knew exactly what they've done."

"It doesn't in the least matter to us. So long as she's the kind of young woman who does something we shall be satisfied."

"Oh, she's that."

"So I saw. And she's an uncommonly good-looking girl. The crowd will be all on her side when she starts breaking up Vittie's meetings."

"You accepted her offer of help then?"

"Certainly," said Titherington. "She's to speak at a meeting of yours on the twenty-first."

Titherington was by this time talking with all his usual buoyant confidence, but I still caught the furtive look in his eyes which I had noticed at first. He seemed to me to have something to conceal, to be challenging criticism and to be preparing to defend himself. Now a man who is on the defensive and who wants to conceal something has generally acted in a way of which he is ashamed. I felt encouraged.

"You didn't commit me in any way, I hope," I said.

"Certainly not. I didn't have to. She was as keen as nuts on helping us and didn't ask a single question about your views on the suffrage question. I needn't say I didn't introduce the subject."

"You didn't sign anything, I suppose?"

Titherington became visibly embarrassed. He hesitated.

"I rather expected you'd have to," I said.

"It wasn't anything of the slightest importance."

"Selby-Harrison drew it up, I expect."

"So she said. But it didn't matter in the least. If it had been anything that tied us down I shouldn't have signed it."

"You would," I said. "Whatever it was you'd have signed it."

"She rather rushed me. She's a most remarkable young woman. However that's all the better for us. If she's capable of rushing me," Titherington's chest swelled again as he spoke, "she'll simply make hay of Vittie. It would be worth going to hear her heckling that beast on votes for women. Believe me, he won't like it."

"She had you at a disadvantage," I said. "You hadn't breakfasted."

Titherington became suddenly thoughtful.

"I wish I knew more about ordinary law," he said. "I'm all right on Corrupt Practices and that kind of thing, but I don't know the phraseology outside of electioneering. Do you think a Jun. Soph. Ord. can be any process in a libel action?"

"It might be. Why do you ask?"

"Well, the paper I signed was a sort of agreement to indemnify them in case of proceedings for libel. I signed because I didn't think a girl like that would be likely to say anything which Vittie would regard as a libel. He's a thick-skinned hound."

"She once libelled twenty-three bishops, she and Hilda and Selby-Harrison between them."

"After all," said Titherington, "you can say pretty near anything you like at an election. Nobody minds. I think we're pretty safe. I'll see that anything she says at our meetings is kept out of the papers, and she won't get the chance of making regular speeches at Vittie's."

I felt quite sorry for Titherington. The interview with Lalage had evidently been even more drastic than I expected.

"Perhaps," I said soothingly, "they'll give her six weeks for the Jun. Soph. Ord., whatever it is, and then the whole election will be over before she gets out."

"We can't allow that," said Titherington. "It would be a downright scandal to subject a girl like that--why, she's quite young and--and actually beautiful."

"We must hope that the Puffin may prove, as she expects, to be a disguised lamb."

"I wish I knew who he is. I might get at him."

"It's too late to do anything now," I said, "but I'll try and find out in the course of the morning. If I can't, we'll get it all in the evening papers. They're sure to report a case of the sort pretty fully."

I left Titherington and walked across toward the club. I met the Archdeacon in St. Stephen's Green. I might, and under ordinary circumstances I should, have slipped past him without stopping, for I do not think he saw me. But I was anxious about Lalage and I thought it likely that he would have some news of her. I hailed him and shook hands

warmly.

"Up for a holiday?" I asked.

"No," said the Archdeacon. "I have eight meetings to attend to-day."

"I mustn't keep you then. How is everybody at home? Canon Beresford and Lalage quite well?"

"I saw Lalage Beresford this morning. I was passing through college on my way to one of my meetings and I saw her standing outside the big hall. She's in her first junior sophister examination to-day."

"Ord?" I said.

"What?"

"Ord?" I repeated. "You said Jun. Soph., didn't you?"

"I said junior sophister."

"Quite so, and it would be Ord., wouldn't it?"

"It's an ordinary, if that's what you mean."

"An ordinary," I said, "is, I suppose, an examination of a commonplace kind."

"It's one that you must get through, not an honour examination."

"I'm so glad I met you. You've relieved my mind immensely. I was afraid it might be an indictable offence. Without your help I should never have guessed!"

The Archdeacon looked at me suspiciously.

"I hope she'll pass," he said, "but I'm rather doubtful."

"Oh, she'll pass all right, she and Hilda. Selby-Harrison may possibly be stuck."

"She's very weak in astronomy."

"Still," I said, "the Puffin is a perfect lamb. I think we may count on that."

The Archdeacon eyed me even more suspiciously than before. I could see that he thought I had been drinking heavily.

"Titherington told me that about the Puffin," I said. "He wanted to bail her out. He'll be just as glad as I am when he hears the truth."

The Archdeacon held out his hand stiffly. I do not blame him in the least for wanting to get away from me. A church dignitary has to consider appearances, and it does not do to stand talking to an intoxicated man in a public street, especially early in the day.

"I think we may take it for granted," I said, "that the Puffin is the man who sets the paper in astronomy."

The Archdeacon left me abruptly, without shaking hands. I lit a cigarette and thought with pleasure of the careful and sympathetic way in which he would break the sad news of my failing to Lord Thormanby. When I reached the club I despatched four telegrams. The first was to Titherington.

"No further cause for anxiety. Jun. Soph. Ord. not a crime but a college examination. The Puffin probably the Astronomer Royal, but some uncertainty prevails on this point. Shall see lady this afternoon and complete arrangements."

I knew that the last sentence would annoy Titherington. I put it in for that purpose. Titherington had wantonly annoyed me.

My other three telegrams were all to Lalage. I addressed one to the rooms of the Elizabethan Society, one to 175 Trinity College, which was, I recollected, the alternative address of the *Anti-Tommy Rot Gazette*, and one to Trinity Hall, where Lalage resided. In this way I hoped to make sure of catching her. I invited her, Hilda, and Selby-Harrison to take tea with me at five o'clock in my hotel. I supposed that by that time the Jun. Soph. Ord. would have run its course. I wished to emphasize the fact that I wanted Lalage to bring Selby-Harrison, whom I had never seen. I underlined his name; but the hall porter to whom I gave the telegram told me that the post-office regulations do not allow the underlining of words. If Titherington succeeds in making me a Member of Parliament, I shall ask the Postmaster-General some nasty questions on this point. It seems to me a vexatious limitation of the rights of the public.

CHAPTER XI

I had luncheon in the club and then, without waiting even for a cup of coffee and a cigarette, went back to my hotel. I felt that I must make the most perfect possible arrangements for my tea party. The violence of my invitations would naturally raise Lalage's expectations to the highest pitch. I sent for the head waiter, who had struck me as an able and intelligent man.

"I am expecting some ladies this afternoon," I said, "and I shall have tea in my sitting room at five o'clock. I want everything to be as nice as possible, fresh flowers and that kind of thing."

The man nodded sympathetically and gave me the impression that long practice had familiarized him with the procedure of tea parties for ladies.

"These ladies are young," I said, "quite young, and so the cakes must be of the most sumptuous possible kind, not ordinary slices cut off large cakes, but small creations, each complete in itself and wrapped in a little paper frill. Do you understand what I mean?"

He said he did, thoroughly.

"I need scarcely say," I added, "that many if not all of the cakes must be coated with sugar. Some ought to be filled with whipped cream. The others should contain or be contained by almond icing."

The head waiter asked for information about the size of the party.

"There are only two ladies," I said, "but they are bringing a young man with them. We may, as he is not here, describe him as a boy. Therefore there must be a large number of cakes, say four dozen."

The head waiter's eyebrows went up slightly. It was the first sign of emotion he had shown.

"I sha'n't eat more than two myself," I said, "so four dozen ought to be enough. I also want ices, twelve ices."

This time the head waiter gasped. It was a cold, a remarkably cold, day, with an east wind and a feeling in the air as if snow was imminent.

"You mustn't understand from that," I said, "that the fire is to be allowed to go out. Quite the contrary. I want a particularly good fire. When the others are eating ices I shall feel the need of it."

The head waiter asked if I had a preference for any particular kind of ice.

"Strawberry," I said, "vanilla, and coffee. Three of each, and three neapolitan. That will make up the dozen. I shall want a whole box of wafers. The ices can be brought in after tea, say at twenty minutes past five. It wouldn't do to have them melting while we were at the cakes, and I insist on a good fire."

The head waiter recapitulated my orders to make sure that he had got them right and then left me.

At twenty minutes to five Lalage and Hilda arrived. They looked very hot, which pleased me. I had been feeling a little nervous about the ices. They explained breathlessly that they were sorry for being late. I reassured them.

"So far from being late," I said "you're twenty minutes too early. I'm delighted to see you, but it's only twenty minutes to five."

"There now, Hilda," said Lalage, "I told you that your old chronometer had most likely darted on again. I should have had lots and lots of time to do my hair. Hilda's watch," she explained to me, "was left to her in her grandmother's will, so of course it goes too fast. It often gains as much as two hours in the course of the morning."

"I wonder you trust it," I said.

"We don't. When we got your first 'gram in the Elizabethan we looked at the clock and saw that we had heaps of time. When your second came--Selby-Harrison sent it over from number 175--we began to think that Hilda's watch might be right after all and that the college clock had stopped. We went back *ventre a terre* on the top of a tram to Trinity Hall and found your third 'gram waiting for us. That made us dead certain that we were late. So we slung on any rags that came handy and simply flew. We didn't even stay to hook up Hilda's back. I jabbed three pins into it in the train."

"I'm sorry," I said, "that you troubled to change your frocks. I didn't expect that you'd have to do that."

"Of course we had. Didn't you know we were in for an exam this morning?"

"I did know that; but I thought you'd have had on your very best so as to soften the Puffin's heart."

"The poor old Puffin," said Lalage, "wouldn't be any the wiser if we turned up in our night dresses. He thinks of nothing but parallaxes. Does he, Hilda?"

Hilda did not answer. She was wriggling her shoulders about, and was sitting bolt upright in her chair. She leaned back once and when she did so a spasm of acute pain distorted her face. It occurred to me that one of the three pins might have been jabbed in too far or not precisely in the right direction. Lalage could not fairly be blamed, for it must be difficult to regulate a pin thrust when a tram is in rapid motion, I did not like the idea of watching Hilda's sufferings

during tea, so I cast about for the most delicate way of suggesting that she should be relieved. Lalage was beforehand with me.

"Turn round, Hilda," she said, "and I'll hook you up."

"Perhaps," I said, "I'd better ring and get a housemaid."

"What for?" said Lalage.

"I thought perhaps that Hilda might prefer to go to a bedroom. I don't matter, of course, but Selby-Harrison may be here at any moment."

"Selby-Harrison isn't coming. Turn round, Hilda, and do stand still."

A waiter came in just then with the tea, I regret to say that he grinned. I turned my back on him and looked out of the window.

"Selby-Harrison," said Lalage, "is on Trinity 3rd A., inside left, and there's a cup match on to-day, so of course he couldn't come."

"This," I said, "is a great disappointment to me. I've been looking forward for years to making Selby-Harrison's acquaintance, and every time I seem to be anywhere near it, something comes and snatches him away. I'm beginning to think that there isn't really any such person as Selby-Harrison."

Hilda giggled thickly. She seemed to be quite comfortable again. Lalage snubbed me severely.

"I must say for you," she said, "that when you choose to go in for pretending to be an ass you can be more funerially idiotic than any one I ever met. No wonder the Archdeacon said you'd be beaten in your election."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes. We were talking to him this morning, Hilda and I and Selby-Harrison, outside the exam hall. We told him we were going down to make speeches for you."

"Was it before or after you told him that he said I'd be beaten?"

"Before," said Lalage firmly.

"Oh, Lalage! How can you? You know----"

I interrupted Hilda because I did not want to have the harmony of my party destroyed by recrimination and argument.

"Suppose," I said, "that we have tea."

"I must say," said Lalage, "that you've collected a middling good show of cakes, hasn't he, Hilda?"

Hilda looked critically at the tea table. She was evidently an expert in cakes.

"You can't have got all those out of one shop," she said. "There isn't a place in Dublin that has so many varieties!"

"I'm glad you like the look of them. Which of you will pour out the tea?"

"Hilda's birthday was last month," said Lalage. "Mine isn't till July."

This settled the point of precedence. Hilda took her seat opposite the teapot.

"There are ices coming," I said a few minutes later, "twelve of them. I mention it in case----"

"Oh, that's all right," said Lalage. "We shall be able to manage the ices. There isn't really much in these cakes."

If Selby-Harrison had come there would, I think, have been cakes enough; but there would not have been any to spare. I only ate two myself. When we had finished the ices we gave ourselves to conversation.

"That Tithers man," said Lalage, "seems to be a fairly good sort."

"Is Tithers another name for the Puffin?"

"No," said Lalage. "Tithers is Joey P."

"He signed his letter Joseph P.," said Hilda, "so at first we called him that."

Titherington usually signs himself Joseph P. I inferred that he was Tithers.

"You liked him?" I said.

"In some ways he's rather an ass," said Lalage, "and just at first I thought he was inclined to have too good an opinion of himself. But that was only his manner. In the end he turned out to be a fairly good sort. I thought he was going to kick up a bit when I asked him to sign the agreement, but he did it all right when I explained to him that he'd have to."

"Lalage," I said, "I'd like very much to see that agreement."

"Hilda has it. Hilda, trot out the agreement." Hilda trotted it out of a small bag which she carried attached to her waist by a chain. I opened it and read aloud:

"Memorandum of an agreement made this tenth day of February between the Members of the A.S.P.L., hereinafter

called the Speakers, of the one part, and Joseph P. Titherington, election agent, of the other."

"I call that rather good," said Lalage.

"Very," I said, "Selby-Harrison did it, I suppose?"

"Of course," said Lalage.

"(1) The Speakers are to deliver for the said election agent . . . speeches before the tenth of March."

"I told Tithers to fill in the number of speeches he wanted," said Lalage, "but he seems to have forgotten."

"(2) The Speakers hereby agree to assign to the said election agent, his successors and assigns, and the said election agent hereby agrees to enjoy, the sole benefit of the above speeches in the British Empire.

"(3) When the demand for such speeches has evidently ceased the said election agent shall be at liberty----"

I paused. There was something which struck me as familiar about the wording of this agreement. I recollected suddenly that the Archdeacon had once consulted me about an agreement which ran very much on the same lines. It came from the office of a well-known publisher. The Archdeacon was at that time bringing out his "Lectures to Confirmation Candidates."

"Has Selby-Harrison," I asked, "been publishing a book?"

"No," said Lalage, "but his father has." "Ah," I said, "that accounts for this agreement form." "Quite so," said Lalage, "he copied it from that, making the necessary changes. Rather piffle, I call that part about enjoying the speeches in the British Empire. It isn't likely that Tithers would want to enjoy them anywhere else. But there's a good bit coming. Skip on to number eight." I skipped and then read again.

"(8) The Speakers agree that the said speeches shall be in no way a violation of existing copyright and the said agent agrees to hold harmless the said speakers from all suits, claims, and proceedings which may be taken on the ground that the said speeches contain anything libellous."

"That's important," said Lalage.

"It is," I said, "very. I notice that Selby-Harrison has a note at the bottom of the page to the effect that a penny stamp is required if the amount is over two pounds. He seems rather fond of that. I recollect he had it in the agreement he drew up for me."

"It wasn't in the original," said Lalage. "He put it in because we all thought it would be safer."

"You were right. After the narrow shave you had with the bishops you can't be too careful. And the amount is almost certain to be over two pounds. Even Vittie's character must be worth more than that."

"Vittie," said Lalage, "appears to be the very kind of man we want to get at. I've been reading his speeches."

"I expect," I said, "that you'll enjoy O'Donoghue too. But Vittie is to be your chief prey. I wonder Mr. Titherington didn't insist on inserting a clause to that effect in the agreement."

"Tither's hated signing it. I was obliged to keep prodding him on or he wouldn't have done it. Selby-Harrison said that either you or he must, so of course it had to be him. We couldn't go for you in any way because we'd promised to respect your scruples."

I recollected the telegram I had received just before leaving Lisbon.

"I wish," I said, "that I felt sure you had respected my scruples. What about Selby-Harrison's father? Has he been consulted?"

"Selby-Harrison isn't coming, only me and Hilda."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing he's in the Divinity School now."

"That needn't stop him," I said. "My constituency is full of parsons, priests, and Presbyterian ministers, all rampant. Selby-Harrison will be in good company. But how did he get into the Divinity School? I thought the Provost said he must take up medicine on account of that trouble with the bishops."

"Oh, that's all blown over long ago. And being a divinity student wasn't his only reason for not coming. The fact is his father lives down there."

"Ah," I said, "That's more serious."

"He wrote to his father and told him to be sure to vote for you. That was as far as he cared to go in the matter."

"It was very good of him to do so much. And now about your mother, Hilda. Has she given her consent?"

"Not quite," said Hilda. "But she hasn't forbidden me."

"We haven't told her," said Lalage.

"Lalage, you haven't respected my scruples and you promised you would. You promised in the most solemn way in a telegram which must have cost you twopence a word."

"We have respected them," said Lalage.

"You have not. My chief scruple was Hilda's mother."

"My point is that you haven't had anything to do with the business. We arranged it all with Tithers and you weren't even asked to give your consent. I don't see what more could have been done for your scruples."

"Hilda's mother might have been asked."

"I can't stop here arguing with you all afternoon," said Lalage. "Come on, Hilda."

"Don't go just yet. I promise not to mention Hilda's mother again."

"We can't possibly stay, can we, Hilda? We have our viva to-morrow."

"Viva!"

"Voce," said Lalage. "You must know what that means. The kind of exam you don't write."

I got viva into its natural connection with voce and grasped at Lalage's meaning.

"Part of the Jun. Soph. Ord.?" I said.

"Of course," said Lalage. "What else could it be?"

"In that case I mustn't keep you. You'll be wanting to look up your astronomy. But you must allow me to parcel up the rest of the cakes for you. I should like you to have them and you're sure to be hungry again before bedtime."

"Won't you want them yourself?"

"No, I won't. And even if I did I wouldn't eat them. It would hardly be fair to Mr. Titherington. He's doing his best for me and he'll naturally expect me to keep as fit as possible."

"Very well," said Lalage, "rather than to leave them here to rot or be eaten by mice we'll take them. Hilda, pack them up in that biscuit tin and take care that the creamy ones don't get squashed."

Hilda tried to pack them up, but the biscuit tin would not hold them all. We had not finished the wafers which it originally contained. I rang for the waiter and made him bring us a cardboard box. We laid the cakes in it very tenderly. We tied on the lid with string and then made a loop in the string for Hilda's hand. It was she who carried both the box and the biscuit tin.

"Good-bye," said Lalage. "We'll meet again on the twenty-first."

It was not until after they were gone that I understood why we should meet again on the twenty-first. That was the day of my first meeting in East Connor, and Lalage had promised to speak at it. I felt very uneasy. It was utterly impossible to guess at what might happen when Lalage appeared in the constituency. I sat down and wrote a letter to Canon Beresford. I did not expect him to do anything, but it relieved my mind to write. After all, it was his business, not mine, to look after Lalage. Three days later I got an answer from him, which said:

"I shall not be at all surprised, if Lalage turns out to be a good platform speaker. She has, I understand, had a good deal of practice in some college debating society and has acquired a certain fluency of utterance. She always had something to say, even as a child. I wish I could run up to County Down and hear her, but it is a long journey and the weather is miserably cold. The Archdeacon told me yesterday that you meant to employ her in this election of yours. He seemed to dislike the idea very much and wanted me to 'put my foot down.' (The phrase, I need scarcely say, is his.) I explained to him that if I put my foot down Lalage would immediately tread on it, which would hurt me and not even trip her. Besides, I do not see why I should. If Lalage finds that kind of thing amusing she ought to be allowed to enjoy it. You have my best wishes for your success with the *turba Quiritium*. I am glad, very, that it is you who have to face them, not I. I do not know anything in the world that I should dislike more."

CHAPTER XII

Titherington took rooms for me in the better of the two hotels in Ballygore and I went down there on the day on which he told me I ought to go. I had as travelling companion a very pleasant man, the only other occupant of the compartment in which I was. He was chatty and agreeable at first and did not so much as mention the general election. After we passed Drogheda his manner changed. He became silent, and when I spoke to him answered snappily. His face got more and more flushed. At last he asked me to shut the window beside me, which I did, although I wanted to keep it open. I noticed that he was wriggling in a curious way which reminded me of Hilda when her dress was fastened on with pins. He fumbled about a good deal with one of his hands which he had thrust inside his waistcoat. I watched him with great curiosity and discovered at last that he was taking his temperature with a clinical thermometer. Each time he took it he sighed and became more restless and miserable looking than before.

On the 19th of February I developed a sharp attack of influenza. Titherington flew to my side at once, which was the thing, of all possible things, that I most wanted him not to do. He aggravated my sufferings greatly by speaking as if my condition were my own fault. I was too feverish to argue coherently. All I could do was to swear at him occasionally. No man has any right to be as stupid as Titherington is. It is utterly ridiculous to suppose that I should undergo racking pains in my limbs, a violent headache and extreme general discomfort if I could possibly avoid it. Titherington ought to have seen this for himself. He did not. He scolded me and would, I am sure, have gone on scolding me until I cried if what he took for a brilliant idea had not suddenly occurred to him.

"It's an ill wind," he said cheerfully, "which can't be made to blow any good. I think I see my way to getting something out of this miserable collapse of yours. I'll call in McMeekin."

"If McMeekin is a doctor, get him. He may not be able to do me any good, but he'll give orders that I'm to be left quiet and that's all I want."

"McMeekin's no damned use as a doctor; but he'll----"

"Then get some one else. Surely he's not the only one there is."

"There are two others, but they're both sure to support you in any case, whereas McMeekin----"

The way Titherington was discussing my illness annoyed me. I interrupted him and tried my best to insult him.

"I don't want to be supported. I want to be cured. Not that any of them can do that. I simply can't and won't have another blithering idiot let loose at me. One's enough."

I thought that would outrage Titherington and drive him from my room. But he made allowances for my condition and refused to take offence.

"McMeekin," he said, "sets up to be a blasted Radical, and is Vittie's strongest supporter."

"In that case send for him at once. He'll probably poison me on purpose and then this will be over."

"He's not such an idiot as to do that. He knows that if anything happened to you we'd get another candidate."

Titherington's tone suggested that the other candidate would certainly be my superior and that Vittie's chances against me were better than they would be against any one else. I turned round with a groan and lay with my face to the wall. Titherington went on talking.

"If you give McMeekin a good fee," he said, "say a couple of guineas, he'll think twice about taking the chair at Vittie's meeting on the twenty-fourth. I don't see why he shouldn't pay you a visit every day from this to the election, and that, at two guineas a time, ought to shut his mouth if it doesn't actually secure his vote."

I twisted my neck round and scowled at Titherington. He left the room without shutting the door. I spent the next hour in hoping vehemently that he would get the influenza himself. I would have gone on hoping this if I had not been interrupted by the arrival of McMeekin. He did all the usual things with stethoscopes and thermometers and he asked me all the usual offensive questions. It seemed to me that he spent far more than the usual time over this revolting ritual. I kept as firm a grip on my temper as I could and as soon as he had finished asked him in a perfectly calm and reasonable tone to be kind enough to put me out of my misery at once with prussic acid. Instead of doing what I, asked or making any kind of sane excuse for refusing, he said he would telegraph to Dublin for a nurse. She could not, he seemed to think, arrive until the next day, so he said he would take a bed in the hotel and look after me himself during the night. This was more than I, or any one else, could stand. I saw the necessity for making a determined effort.

"I am," I said, "perfectly well. Except for a slight cold in the head which makes me a bit stupid there's nothing the matter with me. I intend to get up at once and go out canvassing. Would you mind ringing the bell and asking for some hot water?"

McMeekin rang the bell, muttering as he did so something about a temperature of 104 degrees. A redheaded maid with a freckled face answered the summons. Before I could say anything to her McMeekin gave orders that a second bed should be brought into my room and that she, the red-haired, freckled girl, should sit beside me and not take her

eyes off me for a moment while he went home to get his bag. I forgot all about Titherington then and concentrated my remaining strength on a hope that McMeekin would get the influenza. It is one of the few diseases which doctors do get. I planned that when he got it I would search Ireland for red-headed girls with freckled faces, and pay hundreds of them, all I could collect in the four provinces, to sit beside him and not take their eyes off him while I went to get a bag. My bag, as I arranged, would be fetched by long sea from Tasmania.

That evening McMeekin and Titherington both settled down in my bedroom. I was so angry with them that I could not take in what they said to each other, though I was dimly conscious that they were discussing the election. I learned afterward that McMeekin promised to be present at my meeting on the 21st in order to hear Lalage speak. I suppose that the amount of torture he inflicted on me induced a mood of joyous intoxication in which he would have promised anything. I lay in bed and did my best, by breathing hard, to shoot germs from my lungs across the room at Titherington and McMeekin. Their talk, which must have lasted about eighteen hours, was interrupted at last by a tap at the door. The red-haired girl with a freckled face came in, carrying a loathsome looking bowl and a spoon which I felt certain was filthy dirty. McMeekin took them from her hands and approached me. In spite of my absolutely sickening disgust, I felt with a ferocious joy that my opportunity had at last come. McMeekin tried to persuade me to eat some sticky yellow liquid out of the bowl. I refused, of course. As I had foreseen, he began to shovel the stuff into my mouth with the spoon. Titherington came over to my bedside. He pretended that he came to hold me up while McMeekin fed me. In reality he came to gloat. But I had my revenge. I pawed McMeekin with my hands and breathed full into his face. I also clutched Titherington's coat and pawed him. After that I felt easier, for I began to hope that I had thoroughly infected them both. My recollections of the next day are confused. Titherington and McMeekin were constantly passing in and out of the room and at some time or other a strange woman arrived who paid a deference which struck me as perfectly ridiculous to McMeekin. To me she made herself most offensive. I found out afterward that she was the nurse whom McMeekin had summoned by telegraph. What she said to McMeekin or what he said to her I cannot remember. Of my own actions during the day I can say nothing certainly except this: I asked McMeekin, not once or twice, but every time I saw him, how long it took for influenza to develop its full strength in a man who had thoroughly imbibed the infection. McMeekin either would not or could not answer this simple question. He talked vague nonsense about periods of incubation, whereas I wanted to know the earliest date at which I might expect to see him and Titherington stricken down, I hated McMeekin worse than ever for his dogged stupidity.

The next day McMeekin said I was better, which showed me that Titherington was right in saying that he was no damned use as a doctor. I was very distinctly worse. I was, in fact, so bad that when the nurse insisted on arranging the bedclothes I burst into tears and sobbed afterward for many hours. That ought to have shown her that arranging bedclothes was particularly bad for me. But she was an utterly callous woman. She arranged them again at about eight o'clock and told me to go to sleep. I had not slept at all since I got the influenza and I could not sleep then, but I thought it better to pretend to sleep and I lay as still as I could. After I had been pretending for a long while, at some hour in the very middle of the night, Titherington burst into my room in a noisy way. He was in evening dress and his shirt front had a broad wrinkle across it. I have never seen a more unutterably abhorrent sight than Titherington in evening dress. The nurse rebuked him for having wakened me, which showed me that she was a fool as well as a wantonly cruel woman. I had not been asleep and any nurse who knew her business would have seen that I was only pretending. Titherington took no notice of her. He was bubbling over with something he wanted to say, and twenty nurses would not have stopped him.

"We had a great meeting," he said. "The hall was absolutely packed and the boys at the back nearly killed a man who wanted to ask questions."

"McMeekin, I hope," I said feebly.

"No. McMeekin was on the platform--mind that now--on the platform. I gave him a hint beforehand that we were thinking of calling in another man if you didn't improve. He simply bounded on to the platform after that. It'll be an uncommonly nasty jar for Vittie. The speaking wasn't up to much, most of it; but I wish you'd heard the cheers when I apologized for your absence and told them you were ill in bed. It would have done you good. I wouldn't give tuppence for Vittie's chances of getting a dozen votes in this part of the division. We had two temperance secretaries, damned asses, to propose votes of thanks."

"For my influenza?"

"You're getting better," said Titherington, "not a doubt of it. I'll send you round a dozen of champagne to-morrow, proper stuff, and by the time you've swallowed it you'll be chirrupping like a grasshopper."

"I'm not getting better, and that brute McMeekin wouldn't let me look at champagne. He gives me gruel and a vile slop he calls beef tea."

"If he doesn't give you something to buck you up," said Titherington, "I'll set Miss Beresford on him. She'll make him hop."

The mention of Lalage reminded me that the meeting was the occasion of her first speech.

I found myself beginning to take a slight interest in what Titherington was saying. It did not really matter to me how

things had gone, for I knew that I was going to die almost at once. But even with that prospect before me I wanted to hear how Lalage's maiden speech had been received.

"Did Miss Beresford speak at the meeting?" I asked.

The nurse came over to my bed and insisted on slipping her thermometer under my arm. It was a useless and insulting thing to do, but I bore it in silence because I wanted to hear about Lalage's speech. Titherington did not answer at once, and when he did it was in an unsatisfactory way.

"Oh, she spoke all right," he said.

"You may just as well tell me the truth."

"The speech was a good speech, I'll not deny that, a thundering good speech."

The nurse came at me again and retrieved her abominable thermometer. She twisted it about in the light of the lamp and then whispered to Titherington.

"Don't shuffle," I said to him. "I can see perfectly well that you're keeping something back from me. Did McMeekin insult Miss Beresford in any way? For if he did----"

"Not at all," said Titherington. "But I've been talking long enough. I'll tell you all the rest to-morrow."

Without giving me a chance of protesting he left the room. I felt that I was going to break down again; but I restrained myself and told the nurse plainly what I thought of her.

"I don't know," I said, "whether it is in accordance with the etiquette of your profession to thwart the wishes of a dying man, but that's what you've just done. You know perfectly well that I shall not be alive to-morrow morning and you could see that the only thing I really wanted was to hear something about the meeting. Even a murderer is given some indulgence on the morning of his execution. But just because I have, through no fault of my own, contracted a disease which neither you nor McMeekin know how to cure, I am not allowed to ask a simple question. You may think, I have no doubt you do think, that you have acted with firmness and tact. In reality you have been guilty of blood-curdling cruelty of a kind probably unmatched in the annals of the Spanish Inquisition."

I think my words produced a good deal of effect on her. She did not attempt to make any answer; but she covered up my shoulder with the bedclothes. I shook them off again at once and scowled at her with such bitterness that she left my bedside and sat down near the fire. I saw that she was watching me, so again pretended to go to sleep.

McMeekin came to see me next morning, and had the effrontery to repeat the statement that I was better. I was not, and I told him so distinctly. After he was gone Titherington came with a large bag in his hand. He sent the nurse out of the room and unpacked the bag. He took out of it a dozen small bottles of champagne. He locked the door and then we drank one of the bottles between us. Titherington used my medicine glass. I had the tumbler off the wash-hand-stand. The nurse knocked at the door before we had finished. But Titherington, with a rudeness which made me really like him, again told her to go away because we were talking business. After I had drunk the champagne I began to feel that McMeekin might have been right after all. I was slightly better. Titherington put the empty bottle in the pocket of his overcoat and packed up the eleven full bottles in the bag again. He locked the bag and then pushed it as far as he could under my bed with his foot. He knew, just as well as I did, that either the nurse or McMeekin would steal the champagne if they saw it lying about.

"Now," he said, "you're not feeling so chippy."

"No, I'm not. Tell me about Miss Beresford's speech."

"It began well," said Titherington. "It began infernally well. She stood up and, without by your leave or with your leave, said that all politicians were damned liars."

"Damned?"

"Well, bloody," said Titherington, with the air of a man who makes a concession.

"Was Hilda there?"

"She was, cheering like mad, the same as the rest of us."

"I'm sorry for that. Hilda is, or was, a nice, innocent girl. Her mother won't like her hearing that sort of language."

"Bloody wasn't the word she used," said Titherington, "but she gave us all the impression that it was what she meant!"

"Go on."

"Of course I thought, in fact we all thought, that she was referring to Vittie and O'Donoghue, especially Vittie. The boys at the back of the hall, who hate Vittie worse than the devil, nearly raised the roof off with the way they shouted. I could see that McMeekin didn't half like it. He's rather given himself away by supporting Vittie. Well, as long as the cheering went on Miss Beresford stood and smiled at them. She's a remarkably well set up girl so the boys went on cheering just for the pleasure of looking at her. When they couldn't cheer any more she started off to prove what she said. She began with O'Donoghue and she got in on him. She had a list as long as your arm of the whoppers he and the

rest of that pack of blackguards are perpetually ramming down people's throats. Home Rule, you know, and all that sort of blasted rot. Then she took the skin off Vittie for about ten minutes. Man, but it would have done you good to hear her. The most innocent sort of remark Vittie ever made in his life she got a twist on it so that it came out a regular howling lie. She finished him off by saying that Ananias and Sapphira were a gentleman and a lady compared to the ordinary Liberal, because they had the decency to drop down dead when they'd finished, whereas Vittie's friends simply went on and told more. By that time there wasn't one in the hall could do more than croak, they'd got so hoarse with all the cheering. I might have been in a bath myself with the way the sweat was running off me, hot sweat."

Titherington paused, for the nurse knocked at the door again. This time he got up and let her in. Then he went on with his story.

"The next minute," he said, "it was frozen on me."

"The sweat?"

Titherington nodded.

"Go on," I said.

"She went on all right. You'll hardly believe it, but when she'd finished with O'Donoghue and Vittie she went on to---

"Me, I suppose."

"No. Me," said Titherington. "She said she didn't blame you in the least because she didn't think you had sense enough to lie like a real politician, and that those two letters about the Temperance Question----"

"She'd got ahold of those?"

"They were in the papers, of course, and she said I'd written them. Well, for just half a minute I wasn't quite sure whether the boys were going to rush the platform or not. There wouldn't have been much left of Miss Beresford if they had. But she's a damned good-looking girl. That saved her. Instead of mobbing her every man in the place started to laugh. I tell you there were fellows there with stitches in their sides from laughing so that they'd have given a five-pound note to be able to stop. But they couldn't. Every time they looked at me and saw me sitting there with a kind of a cast-iron grin on my face--and every time they looked at the two temperance secretaries who were gaping like stuck pigs, they started off laughing again. Charlie Sanderson, the butcher, who's a stoutish kind of man, tumbled off his chair and might have broken his neck. I never saw such a scene in my life."

I saw the nurse poking about to find her thermometer. Titherington saw her too and knew what was coming.

"It was all well enough for once," he said, "but we can't have it again."

"How do you propose to stop it?" I asked.

"My idea," said Titherington, "is that you should see her and explain to her that we've had enough of that sort of thing and that for the future she'd better stick entirely to Vittie."

I am always glad to see Lalage. Nothing, even in my miserable condition, would have pleased me better than a visit from her, But I am not prepared at any time to explain things to her, especially when the explanation is meant to influence her action. I am particularly unfitted for the task when I am in a state of convalescence. I interrupted Titherington.

"Nurse," I said, "have you got that thermometer? I'm nearly sure my temperature is up again."

Titherington scowled, but he knew he was helpless. As he left the room he stopped for a moment and turned to me. "What beats me about the whole performance," he said, "is that she never said a single word about woman's suffrage from start to finish. I never met one of that lot before who could keep off the subject for as much as ten minutes at a time even in private conversation."

CHAPTER XIII

I entered next day on what proved to be the most disagreeable stage of my illness. McMeekin called on me in the morning. He performed some silly tricks with a stethoscope and felt my pulse with an air of rapt attention which did not in the least deceive me. Then he intimated that I might sit up for an hour or two after luncheon. The way he made this announcement was irritating enough. Instead of saying straightforwardly, "You can get out of bed if you like," or words to that effect, he smirked at the nurse and said to her, "I think we may be allowed to sit up in a nice comfortable armchair for our afternoon tea to-day." But the permission itself was far worse than the manner in which it was given. I did not in the least want to get up. Bed was beginning to feel tolerably comfortable. I hated the thought of an armchair. I hated still more bitterly the idea of having to walk across the floor. I suppose McMeekin saw by my face that I did not want to get up. He tried, after his own foolish fashion, to cheer and encourage me.

"Poor Vittie's got it too," he said. "I was called in to see him last night."

"Influenza?"

"Yes. It's becoming a perfect epidemic in the district. I have forty cases on my list."

"If Vittie's got it," I said, "there's no reason in the world why I should get up."

McMeekin is a singularly stupid man. He did not see what I meant. I had to explain myself.

"The only object I should have in getting up," I said, speaking very slowly and distinctly, "would be to prevent Vittie going round the constituency when I couldn't be after him. Now that he's down himself he can't do anything more than I can; so I may just as well stay where I am."

Even then McMeekin failed to catch my point.

"You'll have to get up some time or other," he said. "You may just as well start to-day."

When he had left the room I appealed to the nurse.

"Did you ever," I said, "hear a more inane remark than that? In the first place I have pretty well made up my mind never to get up again. It isn't worth while for all the good I ever get by being up. In the second place it's ridiculous to say that because one has to do a thing sometime one may as well do it at once. You have to be buried sometime, but you wouldn't like it if McMeekin told you that you might just as well be buried to-day."

I hold that this was a perfectly sound argument which knocked the bottom out of McMeekin's absurd statement, but it did not convince the nurse. As I might have known beforehand she was in league with McMeekin. Instead of agreeing with me that the man was a fool, she smiled at me in that particularly trying way called bright and cheery.

"But wouldn't it be nice to sit up for a little?" she said.

"No, it wouldn't."

"It would be a change for you, and you'd sleep better afterward."

"I've got on capitally without sleep for nearly a week and I don't see any use in reacquiring a habit, a wasteful habit, which I've succeeded in breaking."

She said something about the doctor's orders.

"The doctor," I replied, "did not give any orders. He gave permission, which is a very different thing."

I spent some time in explaining the difference between an order and a permission. I used simple illustrations and made my meaning so plain that no one could possibly have missed it. The nurse, instead of admitting that I had convinced her, went out of the room. She came back again with a cupful of beef tea which she offered me with another bright smile. If I were not a man with a very high sense of the courtesy due to women I should have taken the cup and thrown it at her head. It is, I think, very much to my credit that I drank the beef tea and then did nothing worse than turn my face to the wall.

At two o'clock she got my dressing gown and somewhat ostentatiously spread it out on a chair in front of the fire. I lay still and said nothing, though I saw that she still clung to the idea of getting me out of bed. Then she rang the bell and made the red-haired girl bring a dilapidated armchair into the room. She pummelled its cushions with her fists for some time and then put a pillow on it. This showed me that she fully expected to succeed in making me sit up. I was perfectly determined to stay where I was. I pretended to go to sleep and even went the length of snoring in a long-drawn, satisfied kind of way. She came over and looked at me. I very slightly opened the corner of one eye and saw by the expression of her face that she did not believe I was really asleep. I prepared for the final struggle by gripping the bedclothes tightly with both hands and poking my feet between the bars at the bottom of the bed.

At three o'clock she had me seated in the armchair, clothed in my dressing gown, with a rug wrapped round my legs. I was tingling with suppressed rage and flushed with a feeling of degradation. I intended, as soon as I regained my self control, to say some really nasty things to her. Before I had made up my mind which of several possible remarks she would dislike most, Titherington came into the room. The nurse does not like Titherington. She has never liked him

since the day that he kept her outside the door while we drank champagne. She always smoothes her apron with both hands when she sees him, which is a sign that she would like to do him a bodily injury if she could. On this occasion, after smoothing her apron and shoving a protruding hair pin into the back of her hair, she marched out of the room.

"McMeekin tells me," I said to Titherington, "that Vittie has got the influenza. Is it true?"

"He says he has," said Titherington, with strong emphasis on the word "says."

"Then I wish you'd go round and offer him the use of my nurse. I don't want her."

"He has two aunts, and besides----"

I was not going to allow Vittie's aunts to stand in my way. I interrupted Titherington with an argument which I felt sure he would appreciate.

"He may have twenty aunts," I said; "that's not my point. What I'm thinking of is the excellent effect it will produce in the constituency if I publicly sacrifice myself by handing over my nurse to my political opponent. The amount of electioneering capital which could be made out of an act of heroism of that kind--why, it would catch the popular imagination more than if I jumped into a mill race to save Vittie from a runaway horse, and everybody knows that if you can bring off a spoof of that sort an election is as good as won."

Titherington growled.

"All the papers would have it," I said. "Even the Nationalists would be obliged to admit that I'd done a particularly noble thing." "I don't believe Vittie has the influenza."

"McMeekin said so."

"It would be just like Vittie," said Titherington, "to pretend he had it so as to get an excuse for calling in McMeekin. He knows McMeekin has been wobbling ever since you got ill."

This silenced me. If Vittie is crafty enough to devise such a complicated scheme-for bribing McMeekin without bringing himself within the meshes of the Corrupt Practices Act he is certainly too wise to allow himself to be subjected to my nurse.

"Anyway," said Titherington, "it's not Vittie's influenza I came here to talk about."

"Have you got the key of your bag with you?"

Titherington was in a bad temper, but he allowed himself to grin. He went down on his hands and knees and dragged the bag from its hiding place under the bed.

We opened two half bottles, but although Titherington drank a great deal more than his share he remained morose.

"That girl," he said, "is playing old hookey with the constituency. I won't be answerable for the consequences unless she's stopped at once."

"I suppose you're speaking about Miss Beresford?"

"Instead of talking rot about woman's suffrage," said Titherington savagely, "and ragging Vittie, which is what we brought her here for, she's going round calling everybody a liar. And it won't do. I tell you it won't do at all."

"You said it was a good speech," I reminded him.

"I shouldn't have minded that speech. It's what she's been at since then. She spent all day yesterday and the whole of this morning going round from house to house gassing about the way nobody in political life ever speaks the truth. She has a lot of young fools worked up to such a state that I can scarcely show my face in the streets, and I hear that they mobbed a man up at the railway station who came down to support O'Donoghue. He deserved it, of course, but it's impossible to say who they'll attack next. Half the town is going about with yards of white ribbon pinned on to them."

"What on earth for?"

"Some foolery. It's the badge of some blasted society she's started. There's A.S.P.L. on the ribbons."

"I told you at the start," I said, "that the letters A.S.P.L. couldn't stand for votes for women, but you would have it that they did."

"She has the whole town placarded with notices of a meeting she's going to hold to-morrow night. We can't possibly have that, you know."

"Well, why don't you stop her?"

"Stop her! I've done every damned thing I could to stop her. I went round to her this morning and told her you'd sign any pledge she liked about woman's suffrage if she'd only clear out of this and go to Belfast. She as good as told me to my face that she wouldn't give a tinker's curse for any pledge I had a hand in giving. My own impression is that she doesn't care if she never got a vote, or any other woman either. All she wants is to turn the place into a bear garden and spoil the whole election. I've come here to tell you plain that if you don't interfere I'll wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Don't do that," I said. "Think of the position I'd be in if you deserted me."

"Then stop her."

"I would. I would stop her at once if I hadn't got the influenza. You see yourself the state I'm in. The nurse wouldn't let me do it even if McMeekin agreed."

"Damn the nurse!"

"I quite agree; and if you'd do as I suggest and cart her off to Vittie----"

"Look here," said Titherington. "It's all very well you're talking like that, but this is serious. The whole election's becoming a farce. Miss Beresford----"

"It's a well-known fact that there is nothing so uncontrollable as a tiger once it has got the taste of human blood, and Miss Beresford, having found out how nice it is to call you and Vittie and O'Donoghue liars, isn't likely to be persuaded----"

"What are you going to do?" said Titherington truculently.

"I? I'm going back to bed as soon as I can, and when once back I'm going to stay there."

Titherington looked so angry that I began to feel afraid. I was quite helpless and I did not want him to revenge himself on me by carrying off the champagne or sending for a second nurse.

"There's just one idea which occurs to me," I said. "I doubt whether it will be much use, but you might try it if you're regularly stuck. Write to Hilda's mother."

"Who the devil's Hilda's mother?"

"I don't know, but you might find out. She strongly disapproves of Hilda's making speeches, and if she knew what is going on here I expect she'd stop it. She'd stop Hilda anyhow."

"Is Hilda the other one."

"Yes," I said. "The minor one."

Titherington got out a note book and a pencil.

"What's her address?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Never mind. I'll hunt all the directories till I find her. What's her name?"

"I don't know."

"Well, what's the girl's name? I suppose the mother's is the same unless she's married again."

"Hilda," I said. "I've told you that three or four times."

"Hilda what?"

"I don't know. I never heard her called anything but Hilda."

Titherington shut his note book and swore. Then he dropped his pencil on the floor. I felt quite sorry for him. If I had known Hilda's surname I should have told it to him at once.

"It's just possible," I said, "that Selby-Harrison's father might know. He lives down in these parts somewhere. Perhaps you've met him."

"There's only one Selby-Harrison here. He's on your committee, a warm supporter of yours."

"That's the man. Selby-Harrison, the son I mean, said he'd write to the old gentleman and tell him to vote for me. I expect he went on my committee after that."

"And you think he can get at this young woman's mother?"

"No. I don't think anything of the sort. All I say is that he may possibly know the name of Hilda's mother."

"Can't I get at Miss Beresford's mother?"

"No, you can't. She's been dead for twenty years."

"A good job for her," said Titherington.

"The Archdeacon would agree with you there."

"What Archdeacon?"

I saw that I had made an unfortunate admission. Titherington, in his present mood, would be quite capable of bringing the Archdeacon down on us here. I would almost rather have a second nurse. I hastened to cover my mistake.

"Any Archdeacon," I said. "You know what Archdeacons are. There isn't one of them belonging to any church who wouldn't disapprove strongly of Miss Beresford."

Titherington grunted.

"If I thought an Archdeacon would be any use," he said, "I'd get a dozen if I had to pay them fifty pounds apiece."

"They wouldn't help in the slightest. Miss Beresford and Hilda have libelled twenty-three bishops in their day. They'd simply laugh at your Archdeacons."

"Well," said Titherington, "I suppose that's all I am to get out of you."

"That's all. If there was anything else I could suggest----"

Titherington picked up his pencil again.

"I'll try Selby-Harrison," he said, "and if he knows the name----"

"If he doesn't, get him to wire to his son for it. He certainly knows."

"I will."

"I needn't tell you," I added, "that the telegram must be cautiously worded."

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that if Selby-Harrison, the son, suspects that you and the father want to worry Hilda or Miss Beresford in any way he'll lie low and not answer the telegram. He's on the committee of the A.S.P.L., so of course he won't want the work of the society to be interfered with."

"If he doesn't answer, I'll go up to Dublin to-night and drag it out of the young pup by force. It'll be a comfort anyhow to be dealing with somebody I can kick. These girls are the very devil."

"No. 175 Trinity College is the address," I said. "J is the initial. If he's not in his rooms when you call just ask where the 3rd A. happens to be playing."

"The what?"

"It's a hockey eleven and it's called the 3rd A. Miss Beresford told me so and I think we may rely on it that she, at least, speaks the truth. Selby-Harrison sometimes plays halfback and sometimes inside left, but anybody would point him out to you."

Titherington took several careful notes in his book.

"It's not much of a chance," I said, "but it will keep you busy for a while and anything is better than sitting still and repining."

"In the infernal fix we're in," said Titherington, "anything is worth trying."

CHAPTER XIV

During the time that Titherington and I were thrown together I learned to respect and admire him, but I never cared for him as a companion. Only once, so far as I recollect, did I actually wish to see him. The day after I gave him the hint about Hilda's mother I waited for him anxiously. I was full of curiosity. I wanted to know what Hilda's surname was, a matter long obscure to me, which Titherington, if any man living, would find out. I also wanted to know how Hilda's mother took the news of her daughter's political activity. I waited for him all day but he did not visit me. Toward evening I came to the conclusion that he must have found himself obliged to go up to Dublin in pursuit of Selby-Harrison, junior. I spent a pleasant hour or two in picturing to myself the interview between them. Titherington had spoken of using violent means of persuasion, of dragging the surname of Hilda out of the young man. He might, so I liked to think, chase Selby-Harrison round the College Park with a drawn sword in his hand. Then there would be complications. The Provost and senior fellows, not understanding Titherington's desperate plight, would resent his show of violence, which would strike them as unseemly in their academic groves. Swift, muscular porters would be sent in pursuit of Titherington, who would, himself, still pursue Selby-Harrison. The great bell of the Campanile would ring furious alarm peals. The Dublin metropolitan police would at last be called in, for Titherington, when in a determined mood, would be very difficult to overpower.

All this was pleasant to think about at first; but there came a time when my mind was chiefly occupied in resenting Titherington's thoughtlessness. He had no right to go off on a long expedition without leaving me the key of the bag in which we kept the champagne. I felt the need of a stimulant so badly that I ventured to ask McMeekin, who called just before I went to bed, to allow me half a glass of Burgundy. Burgundy would not have been nearly as good for me as champagne, but it would have been better than nothing. McMeekin sternly forbade anything of the sort, and I heard him tell the nurse to give me barley water when I asked for a drink. This is another proof that McMeekin ought to be in an asylum for idiots. Barley water would depress me and make me miserable even if I were in perfect health.

As a set-off against Titherington's thoughtlessness and McMeekin's imbecility, I noticed that during the day the nurse became gradually less obnoxious. I began to see that she had some good points and that she meant well by me, though she still did things of which I could not possibly approve. She insisted, for instance, that I should wash my face, a wholly unnecessary exertion which exhausted me greatly and might easily have given me cold. Still I disliked her less than I did before, and felt, toward evening that she was becoming quite tolerable. I always like to give praise to any one who deserves it, especially if I have been obliged previously to speak in a different way. After I got into bed I congratulated her on the improvement I had noticed in her character and disposition. She replied that she was delighted to see that I was beginning to pick up a little. The idea in her mind evidently was that no change had taken place in her but that I was shaking off a mood of irritable pessimism, one of the symptoms of my disease. I did not argue with her though I knew that she was quite wrong. There really was a change in her and I had all along kept a careful watch over my temper.

The day after that, being, I believe, the eighth of my illness, I got up at eleven o'clock and put on a pair of trousers under my dressing-gown. McMeekin, backed by the nurse, insisted on my sending for a barber to shave me. I did not like the barber, for, like all his tribe, he was garrulous and I had to appeal to the nurse to stop him talking. Afterward I was very glad I had endured him. Lalage and Hilda called on me at two o'clock, and I should not have liked them to see me in the state I was in before the barber came. They both looked fresh and vigorous. Electioneering evidently agreed with them.

"We looked in," said Lalage, "because we thought you might want to be cheered up a bit. You can't have many visitors now that poor Tithers is gone."

"Dead?"

"Oh, no, not yet at least, and we hope he won't. Tithers means well and I daresay it's not his fault if he don't speak the truth."

"They've put him in prison, I suppose. I hardly thought they'd allow him to chop up Selby-Harrison in the College Park."

Hilda gaped at me. Lalage went over to the nurse and whispered something in her ear. The nurse shook her head and said that my temperature was normal.

"If you're not raving," said Lalage, "you're deliberately talking nonsense. I don't know what you mean, nor does Hilda."

"It ought to be fairly obvious," I said, "that I'm alluding to Mr. Titherington's attempt to find out Hilda's surname from young Selby-Harrison."

Hilda giggled convulsively. Then she got out her pocket handkerchief and choked.

"Tithers," said Lalage, "is past caring about anybody's name. He's got influenza. It came on him the night before last

at twelve o'clock. He's pretty bad."

"I'm glad to hear that. I was afraid he might have been arrested in Dublin. If it's only influenza there's no reason why he shouldn't send me the key of the bag. I suppose you'll be going round to see him in the course of the afternoon, Lalage."

"We hadn't thought of doing that," said Lalage, "but of course we can if you particularly want us to."

"I wish you would, and tell him to send me the key of the bag at once. You could bring it back with you."

"Certainly," said Lalage. "Is that all?"

"That's all I want; but it would be civil to ask how he is."

"There's no use making a special, formal visit for a trifle like that. Hilda will run round at once. It won't take her ten minutes."

Hilda hesitated.

"Run along, Hilda," said Lalage.

Hilda still hesitated. It occurred to me that she might not know where Titherington's house was.

"Turn to the right," I said, "as soon as you get out of the hotel. Then go on to the end of the street. Mr. Titherington's house is at the corner and stands a little way back. It has 'Sandringham' in gilt letters on the gate. You can't miss it. In fact, you can see it from the door of the hotel. Nurse will show it to you."

Even then Hilda did not start.

"The key of what bag?" she asked.

"Is it any particular bag?" said Lalage.

"Of course it is," I said. "What on earth would be the use----?"

"Will Tithers know what bag you mean?" said Lalage.

"He will. Now that he has influenza himself he can't help knowing."

"Off with you, Hilda."

This time Hilda started, slowly. The nurse, who evidently thought that Hilda was being badly treated, went with her. She certainly took her as far as the hotel door. She may have gone all the way to Titherington's house. Lalage sat down opposite me and lit a cigarette.

"We are having a high old time," she said. "Now that Tithers is gone and O'Donoghue, who appears to be rather an ass, professes to have a sore throat----"

She winked at me.

"Do you suspect him of having influenza?" I asked.

"Of course, but he won't own up if he can help it."

"Vittie is only shamming," I said. "Titherington told me so, he may emerge at any moment."

"It's just like Tithers to say that. The one thing he cannot do is speak the truth. As a matter of fact Vittie is in a dangerous condition. His aunt told me so."

"Have you been to see him?"

"No. The aunt came round to us this morning with tears in her eyes, and begged us to spare Vittie."

"I suppose the things you have been saying about him have made him worse."

"According to his aunt they keep him in such an excitable state that he can't sleep. I told her I was jolly glad to hear it. That just shows the amount of good the A.S.P.L. is doing in the district. It's making its power felt in every direction."

"If Vittie dies----"

"He won't. That sort of man never does. I'm sorry for the aunt of course. She seemed a quiet, respectable sort of woman and, curiously enough, very fond of Vittie. I told her that I'd do anything I conscientiously could to lull off Vittie, but that I had my duty to perform. And I have, you know. I'm clearing the air."

"It wants it badly. McMeekin told me two days ago he had forty cases and there are evidently a lot more now."

"I'm not talking about microbes," said Lalage. "What I'm talking about is the moral 'at'."

I thought for a moment.

--"titude?" I ventured to suggest.

"No," said Lalage, "--mosphere. It wants it far worse than the other air. I had no idea till I took on this job that politics are such utter sinks as they are. What you tell me now about Vittie is just another example of what I mean. I dare say now it will turn out that he went to bed in the hope of escaping my exposure of the way he's been telling lies."

"Titherington hinted," I said, "that he did it in the hope of influencing McMeekin's vote. Fees, you know."

"That's worse."

"A great deal worse."

"Funk," said Lalage, "which is what I did suspect him of, is comparatively honest, but a stratagem of the kind you suggest, is as bad as felony. I shall certainly have at him for that."

"Titherington will be tremendously pleased if you do."

"I'm not trying to please Tithers. I'm acting in the interests of public morality."

"Still," I said, "there's no harm in pleasing Tithers incidentally."

"I have a big meeting on to-night. Hilda takes the chair, and I'll rub it in about Vittie shamming sick. I never heard anything more disgraceful. Can Tithers be playing the same game, do you think?"

"I don't know," I said. "Hilda will be able to tell us that when she comes back."

Hilda came back so soon that I think she must have run part of the way at least. Probably she ran back, when the nurse was not with her.

"He won't send you the key," she said, "but he wants you to send him the bag."

"Is he shamming?" said Lalage, "or has he really got it?"

"I don't know. I didn't see him."

"If you didn't see him," I said hopefully, "you may be wrong after all about his wanting the bag. He can't be so selfish."

"Who did you see?" said Lalage.

"Mrs. Titherington," said Hilda. "She----"

"Fancy there being a Mrs. Tithers," said Lalage. "How frightfully funny! What was she like to look at?"

"Never mind that for the present, Hilda," I said. "Just tell me about the key."

"She took your message up to him," said Hilda, "and came down again in a minute looking very red in the face."

"Titherington must have sworn at her," I said. "What a brute that man is!"

"You'd better take him round the bag at once," said Lalage. "Where is it?"

"He shan't have the bag," I said. "There are only eight bottles left and I want them myself."

"Bottles of what?"

"Champagne, of course."

"His or yours?" asked Lalage.

"They were his at first. They're mine now, for he gave them to me, and I'm going to keep them."

"I don't see what all the fuss is about," said Lalage. "Do you, Hilda? I suppose you and Tithers can both afford to buy a few more bottles if you want them."

"You don't understand," I said. "I'm quite ready to give a sovereign a bottle if necessary, and I'm sure that Titherington would, too. The point is that my nurse won't let me have any, and I don't suppose Titherington's wife will let him. That ass McMeekin insists on poisoning me with barley water, and Titherington's doctor, whoever he is, is most likely doing the same."

"I see," said Lalage. "This just bears out what I've been saying all along about the utter want of common honesty in political life. Here are you and Tithers actually quarrelling about which of you is to be allowed to lie continuously. You are deliberately deceiving your doctor and nurse. Tithers wants to deceive his wife, which is, if anything, a shade worse. Hilda, find that bag."

"Lalage," I said, "you're not going to give it to Titherington, are you? It wouldn't be good for him, it wouldn't really."

"Make your mind quite easy about that," said Lalage. "I'm not going to give it to either of you. Hilda, look under the bed. That's just the idiotic sort of place Tithers would hide a thing."

I heard Hilda grovelling about on the floor. A minute later she was dragging the bag out.

"What are you going to do with it, Lalage?"

"Take it away and keep it myself till you're both well."

"We never shall be," I said. "We shall die. Please, Lalage, please don't."

"It's the only honest course," said Lalage.

I made an effort to assert myself, though I knew it was useless.

"There is such a thing," I said, "as carrying honesty too far. All extremes are wrong. There are lots of occasions on which it isn't at all right to tell the literal truth."

"None," said Lalage.

"Suppose a robber was robbing you, and you had a five-pound note inside your sock and suppose he said to you, 'Have you any more money?'"

"That has nothing to do with the way you and Tithers have conspired together to deceive the very people who are trying to do you good."

"Lalage," I said, "I've subscribed liberally to the funds of the society. I'll subscribe again. I did my best for you at the time of the bishop row. I don't think you ought to turn on me now because I'm adopting the only means in my power of resisting a frightful tyranny. You might just as well call it dishonest of a prisoner to try to escape because he doesn't tell the gaoler beforehand how he's going to do it."

"Hilda," said Lalage, "collar that bag and come on."

"Lalage," I said sternly, "if you take that bag I'll write straight to the Archdeacon."

Hilda was already outside the door. Lalage turned.

"It will be much more unpleasant for you than for me," she said, "if you bring the Archdeacon down here. I'm not afraid of him. You are."

"I'll write to Miss Battersby. I'll write to the Provost, and to Miss Pettigrew. I'll write to Hilda's mother. I'll get Selby-Harrison to write, too. I'll---"

Lalage was gone. I rang the bell savagely and told the nurse to get my pens, ink, and paper. I thoroughly agreed with Titherington. Lalage's proceedings must be stopped at once.

CHAPTER XV

I wrote the first page of a letter to the Archdeacon and expressed myself, so far as I could in that limited space, strongly. I gave him to understand that Lalage must be either enticed or forced to leave Bally-gore. I intended to go onto a description of the sort of things Lalage had been doing, of Titherington's helplessness and Vittie's peril. But I was brought up short at the end of the first page by the want of blotting paper. The nurse brought me two pens, a good sized bottle of ink, several quires of paper and about fifty envelopes. Then she went out for her afternoon walk, and I did not discover until after she had gone that I had no blotting paper. The only course open to me was to wait, as patiently as I could, until the first page of the letter dried. It took a long time to dry, because I was very angry when I began to write and had pressed heavily on the pen. The crosses of my t's were like short broad canals. The loops of the e's, Fs and such letters were deep pools, and I had underlined one word with some vigour. I waved the sheet to and fro in the air. When I got tired of waving it I propped it up against the fender and let the heat of the fire play on it.

While I was waiting my anger gradually cooled and I began to see that Lalage was perfectly right in saying that I should suffer most if the Archdeacon came to our rescue. The story of the champagne in the bag would leak out at once. The Archdeacon, as I recollected, already suspected me of intemperance. When he heard that I was drinking secretly and keeping a private supply of wine he would be greatly shocked and would probably feel that it was his duty to act firmly. He would, almost certainly, hold a consultation with McMeekin. McMeekin is just the sort of man to resent anything in the way of a professional slight from one of his patients. Goaded on by the Archdeacon he would invent some horrible punishment for me. In mediaeval times, so I am given to understand, the clergy tortured people, in cells, for the good of their souls, and any one who had a private enemy denounced him to the Grand Inquisitor. Faith has nowadays given way before the assaults of science and it is the doctors who possess the powers of the rack. Instead of being suspected of heresy a man is now accused of having an abscess on his appendix. His doom is much the same, to have his stomach cut open with knives, though the name given to it is different. It is now called an operation. The older term, rather more expressive, was disembowelling. Four hundred years ago McMeekin, if he had a grievance against me, would have denounced me to the Archdeacon. Now, things have changed so far that it is the Archdeacon who denounces me to McMeekin. The result for me is much the same. I do not suppose that my case would either then or now be one for extreme penalties. I am not the stuff of which obstinate heretics are made, nor have I any heroic tumour which would render me liable to the knife. Slow starvation, a diet of barley water, beef tea, and milk puddings, would meet the requirements of my case. But I did not want any more barley water and beef tea. I have always, from my childhood up, hated milk puddings. I thought over my position carefully and by the time the first sheet of my letter to the Archdeacon was dry, I had arrived at the conclusion that I had better not go on with it. I burned it.

Lalage's meeting, held that night, was an immense success. The town hall was packed to its utmost capacity and I am told that Lalage spoke very well indeed. She certainly had a good subject and a fine opportunity. Vittie, O'Donoghue, and I were all in bed. Our chief supporters, Titherington and the others, were helpless, with temperatures ranging from 102 to 105 degrees. But even if we had all been quite well and in full possession of our fighting powers we could not have made any effective defence against Lalage. She had an astonishingly good case. Titherington, for instance, might have talked his best, but he could not have produced even a plausible explanation of those two letters of ours on the temperance question. O'Donoghue was in a worse case. He had made statements about budgets and things of that kind which Lalage's favourite word only feebly describes. Vittie, apart altogether from any question of the genuineness of his influenza, was in the narrowest straits of us all. He appears to have lied with an abandon and a recklessness far superior to O'Donoghue's or mine. Lalage, so I heard afterward, spent an hour and a half denouncing us and devoted about two-thirds of the time to Vittie. His aunts must have had a trying time with him that night unless McMeekin came to their rescue with an unusually powerful sleeping draught.

What Lalage said did not keep me awake; but the immediate results of her meeting broke in upon a sleep which I needed very badly. My nurse left me for the night and I dropped off into a pleasant doze. I dreamed, I recollect, that the Archdeacon was bringing me bottles of whiskey in Titherington's bag and that Hilda was standing beside me with the key. I was roused, just as I was about to open the bag, by a terrific noise of bands in the streets. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and even during elections, bands at that hour are unusual. Besides, the bands which I heard were playing more confusedly than even the most excited bands do. It occurred to me that there might possibly be a riot going on and that the musicians were urging forward the combatants. I crawled out of bed and stumbled across the room. I was just in time to see a torchlight procession passing my hotel. The night was windy and the torches flared most successfully, giving quite enough light to make everything plainly visible.

At the head of the procession were two bands a good deal mixed up together. I at once recognized the uniform of the Loyal True Blue Fife and Drums, whose members were my supporters to a man, and who possess many more drums than fifes. The bright-green peaked caps of the other players told me that they were the Wolfe Tone Invincible Brass Band. It usually played tunes favourable to O'Donoghue. Vittie did not own a band. If his supporters had been musical, and if there had been any tunes in the world which expressed their political convictions, there would, no doubt, have

been three bands in the procession. The True Blues and the Wolfe Tones were, when they passed me, playing different tunes. In every other respect the utmost harmony prevailed between them. The chief drummer of the True Blues and the cornet player of the Wolfe Tones stopped just under my windows to exchange instruments, an act of courtesy which must be unparalleled in Irish history. I was not able to hear distinctly what sort of attempt my supporter made at the cornet part of "God Save Ireland." But O'Donoghue's friend beat time to "The Protestant Boys" on the drum with an accuracy quite surprising considering that he cannot often have practised the tune. Behind the bands closely surrounded by torch bearers came a confused crowd of men dragging and pushing a wagonette, from which the horses had been taken. In the wagonette were Lalage and Hilda. Lalage was standing up in the driver's seat, a most perilous position. She had in one hand a large roll of white ribbon, the now well-known symbol of the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying, and in her other hand a pair of scissors. She snipped off bits of the ribbon and allowed them to go fluttering away from her in the wind. The crowd scrambled eagerly for them, and it was plain that the association was enrolling members in hundreds. Hilda seemed less happy. She was crouching in the body of the wagonette and looked frightened. Perhaps she was thinking of her mother. I crept back to bed when the procession had passed and felt deeply thankful that I was laid up with influenza. Lalage's meeting was, without doubt, an unqualified success.

Newspapers are, as a rule, busy enough about what happens even in quite obscure constituencies during by-elections. If ours had been one of those occasional contests the subject of public lying, Lalage's portrait and the story of the two bands men would have been quite familiar to all readers. During a general election very few details of particular campaigns can be printed. Editors are kept busy enough chronicling the results and keeping up to date the various clocks, ladders, kites and other devices with which they inform their readers of the state of parties. I was therefore quite hopeful that our performances in Ballygore would escape notice. They did not. Some miserably efficient and enterprising reporter strayed into the town on the very evening of Lalage's meeting and wrote an account of her torchlight procession. The whole thing appeared next morning in the paper which he represented. Other papers copied his paragraphs, and very soon hundreds of them in all parts of the three kingdoms were making merry over the plight of the candidates who lay in bed groaning while a piratical young woman took away their characters. I did not in the least mind being laughed at. I have always laughed at myself and am quite pleased that other people should share my amusement. But I greatly feared that complications of various kinds would follow the publicity which was given to our affairs. Vittie almost certainly, O'Donoghue probably, would resent being made to look ridiculous. Hilda's mother and the Archdeacon might not care for the way in which Lalage emphasized the joke.

My fellow candidates were the first to object. I received letters from them both, written by secretaries and signed very shakily, asking me to cooperate with them in suppressing Lalage. O'Donoghue, who was apparently not quite so ill as Vittie was, also suggested that we should publish, over our three names, a dignified rejoinder to the mirth of the press. He enclosed a rough draft of the dignified rejoinder and invited criticism and amendment from me. My proper course of action was obvious enough. I made my nurse reply with a bulletin, dictated by me, signed by her and McMeekin, to the effect that I was too ill to read letters and totally incapable of answering them. I gave McMeekin twenty-five pounds for medical attendance up to date, just before I asked him to sign the bulletin. I also presented the nurse with a brooch of gold filagree work, which I had brought home with me from Portugal, intending to give it to my mother. It would have been churlish of them, afterward, to refuse to sign my bulletin.

This disposed of Vittie and O'Donoghue for the time. But I knew that there was more trouble before me. I was scarcely surprised when Canon Beresford walked into my room one evening at about nine o'clock. He looked harassed, shaken, and nervous. I asked him at once if he were an influenza convalescent.

"No," he said, "I'm not. I wish I were."

"There are worse things than influenza. I used not to think so at first, but now I know there are. Why don't you get it? I suppose you've come to see me in hope of infection."

"No. I came to warn you. We've just this moment arrived and you may expect us on you to-morrow morning."

"You and the Archdeacon?"

"No. Thank goodness, nothing so bad as that. The Archdeacon is at home."

"I wonder at that. I fully expected he'd have been here."

"He would have been if he could. He wanted to come, but of course it was impossible. You heard I suppose, that the bishop is dead."

"No, I didn't hear. Influenza?"

"Pneumonia, and that ties the Archdeacon."

"What a providential thing! But you said 'we.' Is Thormanby here?"

"No, Thormanby told me yesterday that he'd washed his hands of the whole affair."

"That's exactly what I've done," I said. "It's by far the most sensible thing to do. I wonder you didn't."

"I tried to," said the Canon piteously. "I did my best. I have engaged a berth on a steamer going to Brazil, one that

hasn't got a wireless telegraphic installation, and I've secured a *locum tenens* for the parish. But I shan't be able to go. You can guess why."

"The Archdeacon?"

The Canon nodded sadly. I did not care to make more inquiries about the Archdeacon.

"Well," I said, "if neither he nor Thormanby is with you, who is?"

"Miss Battersby for one. She volunteered."

I felt relieved. Miss Battersby is never formidable.

"She won't matter," I said. "Lalage and Hilda will put her to bed and keep her there. That's what they did with her on the way to Lisbon."

"And Miss Pettigrew," said the Canon.

"How on earth does she come to be mixed up in it?"

"Your mother telegraphed to her and begged her to come down with us to see what she could do. She's supposed to have some influence with Lalage."

"What sort of woman is she? I don't know her personally. Lalage says she's the kind of person that you hate and yet can't help rather loving, although you're afraid of her. Is that your impression of her?"

"She has a strongly developed sense of humour," said the Canon, "and I'm afraid she's rather determined."

"What do you expect to do?"

"I don't myself expect to do anything," said the Canon.

"I meant to say what is the ostensible object of the expedition?"

"The Archdeacon spoke of our rescuing Lalage from an equivocal position."

"You ought to make that man bishop," I said.

"Miss Battersby kept on assuring us all the way down in the train that Lalage is a most lovable child, very gentle and tractable if taken the right way, but high spirited."

"That won't help her much, because she's no nearer now than she was ten years ago to finding out what is the right way to take Lalage. What are Miss Petti-grew's views?"

"She varies," said the Canon, "between chuckling over your position and wishing that Lalage was safely married with some babies to look after. She says there'll be no peace in Ireland until that happens."

"That's an utterly silly scheme. There's nobody here to marry her except Vittie, and I'm perfectly certain his aunts wouldn't let him. He has two aunts. If that is all Miss Pettigrew has to suggest she might as well have stopped at home."

The Canon sighed.

"I'm afraid I must be going," he said, "I promised Miss Pettigrew that I'd be back in half an hour. We're going to see Lalage at once."

"Lalage will be in bed by the time you get there; if she's not organizing another torchlight procession. You'd far better stop where you are."

"I'd like to, but----"

"You can get a bed here and send over for your things. Your two ladies are in the other hotel, I suppose."

"Yes. We knew you were here and Miss Battersby seemed a little afraid of catching influenza, so we went to the other."

"That's all right. You'll be quite safe for the night if you stop here."

"I wish I could, but----"

"You'll not do any good by talking to Lalage. You know that."

"I know that of course; but----"

"It won't be at all pleasant for you when Miss Pettigrew comes out with that plan of hers for marrying Lalage to Vittie. There'll be a horrid row. From what I know of Lalage I feel sure that she'll resent the suggestion. There'll be immense scope for language in the argument which follows and they'll all feel freer to speak out if there isn't a church dignitary standing there listening."

"I know all that, but still----"

"You don't surely mean to say that you *want* to go and wrangle with Lalage?"

"Of course not. I hate that kind of thing and always did; but----"

"Out with it, Canon. You stick at that 'but' every time."

"I promised Miss Pettigrew I'd go back."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. The fact is--you don't know Miss Pettigrew, so you won't understand."

"You're afraid of her?" I said.

"Well, yes, I am. Besides, the Archdeacon said some stiff things to me before we started, uncommonly stiff things. Stiff isn't the word I want, but you'll probably know what I mean."

"Prickly," I suggested.

"Yes, prickly. Prickly things about the responsibility of fatherhood and the authority of parents. I really must go."

"Very well. If you must, you must, of course. But don't drag me into it. Remember that I've got influenza and if Miss Pettigrew and Miss Battersby come here I'll infect them. I rely on you to nip in the bud any suggestion that I've anything to do with the affair one way or the other. I tell you plainly that I'd rather see Lalage heading a torchlight procession every day in the week than married to Vittie."

"The Archdeacon says that you are the person chiefly responsible for what he calls Lalage's compromising position."

"The Archdeacon may say what he likes. I'm not responsible. Good heavens, Canon, how can you suppose for an instant that anybody could, be responsible for Lalage?"

"I didn't suppose it. I was only quoting the Archdeacon."

"I wish to goodness the Archdeacon would mind his own business!"

"That's what he's doing," said the Canon. "If he wasn't he'd be here now. He wanted to come. If the poor old bishop had held out another week he would have come."

The Canon left me after that.

CHAPTER XVI

I fully expected a visit from Miss Pettigrew in the course of the next day. I was not disappointed. She arrived at three o'clock, bringing the Canon with her. I was greatly impressed by her appearance. She has bright eyes which twinkled, and she holds her head very straight, pushed well back on her shoulders so that a good deal of her neck is visible below her chin. I felt at once that she was the sort of woman who could do what she liked at me. I attempted my only possible line of defence.

"Aren't you afraid of influenza?" I said. "Is it wise----?"

"I'm not in the least afraid," said Miss Pettigrew.

"Not for yourself, of course," I said. "But you might carry it back to Miss Battersby. I'm horribly infectious just now. Even the nurse washes herself in Condy's Fluid after being near me."

"Miss Battersby must take her chance like the rest of us. I've come to talk about Lalage."

"I told the Canon last night," I said, "that I'm not capable of dealing with Lalage. I really am not. I know because I've often tried."

"Listen to me for a minute," said Miss Pettigrew. "We've got to get Lalage out of this. I'm not given to taking conventional views of things and I'm the last woman in Ireland to want to make girls conform to the standard of what's called ladylikeness. But Lalage has gone too far. The newspapers are full of her and that's not good for any girl."

"I'm sure," I said, "that if you represent that view of the case to Lalage----"

"We have. We spent two hours with her last night and three hours this morning. We didn't produce the slightest effect."

"Hilda cried," said the Canon.

"After all," I said, "that's something. I couldn't have made Hilda cry."

"Hilda doesn't count," said Miss Pettigrew. "She's a dear girl but anybody could manage her. We didn't make Lalage cry."

"No," I said, "you couldn't, of course. In fact, I expect, Lalage made you laugh."

Miss Pettigrew smiled and then checked herself. Amusement struggled with a certain grimness for expression on her face. In the end she smiled again.

"Lalage has always made me laugh," she said, "ever since she was quite a little girl. That's what makes it so difficult to manage her."

"Why try?" I said. "Lord Thormanby has washed his hands of her. So have I. The Canon wants to. Wouldn't it be simpler if you did too?"

"It would be much simpler," said Miss Pettigrew. "But I'm not going to do it. I have a very strong affection for Lalage."

"We all have," I said. "No one, not even the Canon has a stronger affection than I have; but I don't see how that helps us much. Something more is required. If sincere affection would have saved Lalage from the equivocal position in which she now is----"

Miss Pettigrew looked at me in a curious way which made me feel hot and very uncomfortable even before I understood what she was thinking about. Her eyes twinkled most brilliantly. The smile which had hovered about her lips before broadened. I recollected what the Canon told me the night before. Miss Pettigrew had suggested marriage for Lalage. I had at once thought of Vittie. Miss Pettigrew was not thinking of Vittie. I felt myself getting red in the face as she looked at me.

"I couldn't," I said at last. "This influenza has completely unstrung me. I shouldn't have the nerve. You must admit, Miss Pettigrew, that it would require nerve."

"I'm not suggesting your doing it to-day," said Miss Pettigrew.

"Nor any other day," I said. "I shouldn't be able to screw myself up to the pitch. I'm not that kind of man at all. What you want is some one more of the Young Lochinvar type, or a buccaneer. They're all dashing men who shrink from nothing. Why not advertise for a buccaneer?"

"I don't suppose she'd marry you if you did ask her," said Miss Pettigrew.

"I am sure she wouldn't, so we needn't go on talking about that. Won't you let me ring and get you a cup of tea? They make quite good tea in this hotel!"

"It's too early for tea, and I want to discuss this business of Lalage's seriously. The position has become quite impossible."

"It's been that for more than a week--but it still goes on. That's the worst of impossible positions. Nobody can ever

stop them. Titherington said it was impossible the day before he got influenza. You don't know Titherington, nor does the Canon. But if you did you'd realize that he's not the kind of man to let an impossible position alone and yet he was baffled. I had letters yesterday morning from Vittie and O'Don-oghue asking me to cooperate with them in suppressing Lalage. They see that the position is impossible just as plainly as you do. But they can't do anything. In fact they've gone to bed."

"I'm not going to bed," said Miss Pettigrew. "I'm going to bring Lalage home with me."

"How?"

"I rather hoped," said Miss Pettigrew, "that you might have some suggestion that would help us."

"I made my only suggestion to Titherington a week ago and it didn't come off. There's no use my making it again!"

"What was it? Perhaps I could work it out."

"It wasn't much of a suggestion really. It was only Hilda's mother."

"I've wired to her and she'll be here to-morrow. I've no doubt that she'll carry off Hilda, but she has no authority over Lalage."

"Nobody has," said the Canon despondingly. "I've said that all along."

"What about the Provost of Trinity College?" I said. "He tackled her over the bishops. You might try him."

"He won't interfere," said the Canon. "I asked him."

"Well," I said, "I can do no more. You can see for yourself, Miss Pettigrew, that I'm not in a state to make suggestions. I'm completely exhausted already and any further mental exertion will bring on a relapse. Do let me ring for tea. I want it myself."

The door opened as I spoke. I hoped that my nurse or McMeekin had arrived and would insist on my being left in peace. I was surprised and, in spite of my exhaustion, pleased to see Lalage and Hilda walk in.

"Father," said Lalage, "why didn't you tell me last night that the bishop is dead?"

"I didn't think it would interest you," said the Canon.

"Of course it interests me. When poor old Pussy mentioned it to me just now I simply hopped out of my shoes with excitement and delight. So did Hilda."

"Did you hate the bishop that much?" I asked. "Worse than other bishops?"

"Not at all," said Lalage. "I never saw him except once and then I thought he was quite a lamb."

"Hilda," I said, "why did you hop out of your shoes with excitement and delight when you heard of the death of an old gentleman who never did you any harm?"

"We'll have to elect another, won't we?" said Lalage.

A horrible dread turned me quite cold. I glanced at Miss Pettigrew. Her eyes had stopped twinkling. I read fear, actual fear, in the expression of her face. We both shrank from saying anything which might lead to the confirming of our worst anticipations. It was the Canon who spoke next. What he said showed that he was nearly desperate.

"Lalage," he said, "will you come with me for a tour to Brazil? I've booked one berth and I can easily get another!"

"I can't possibly go to Brazil," said Lalage, "and you certainly ought not to think of it till the bishopric election is over."

"I'll take Hilda, too," said the Canon. "I should like to have Hilda. You and she would have great fun together."

"I'll give Selby-Harrison a present of his ticket," I added, "and pay his hotel expenses. It would be a delightful trip."

"Brazil," said Miss Pettigrew, "is one of the most interesting countries in the world. I can lend you a book on the natural history."

"Hilda's mother wouldn't let her go," said Lalage. "Would she, Hilda?"

"I'm afraid not," said Hilda. "She thinks I ought to be more at home."

"Miss Pettigrew will talk her over," I said. "It's a great chance for Hilda. She oughtn't to miss it."

"And Selby-Harrison has just entered the Divinity School," said Lalage. "He couldn't possibly afford the time."

"The long days on the steamer," I said, "would be perfectly invaluable to him. He could read theology from morning to night. There'd be nothing, except an occasional albatross, to distract his attention."

"Those South American republics," said Miss Pettigrew, "are continually having revolutions."

Miss Pettigrew is certainly a very clever woman. Her suggestion was the first thing which caused Lalage to waver. A revolution must be very attractive to a girl of her temperament; and revolutions are comparatively rare on this side of the Atlantic. Lalage certainly hesitated.

"What do you think, Hilda?" she asked.

For one moment I dared to hope.

"There's been a lot of gun-running done out there lately," I said, "and I heard of a new submarine on the Amazon." I am afraid I overdid it. Miss Pettigrew certainly frowned at me.

"Mother would never let me," said Hilda.

I had forgotten Hilda's mother for the moment. I saw at once that the idea of gun-running would frighten her and she would not like to think of her daughter ploughing the bottom of the Amazon in a submarine.

"Besides," said Lalage, "it wouldn't be right. It's our duty, our plain duty, to see this bishopric election through. I'm inclined to think that the Archdeacon is the proper man."

"When do you start for the scene of action?" I asked.

"At once," said Lalage. "There's a train at six o'clock this evening. We left poor Pussy packing her bag and ran round to tell Miss Pettigrew about the change in our plans. I'm dead sick of this old election of yours, anyhow. Aren't you?"

"I am," I said fervently. "I'm so sick of it that I don't care if I never stand for Parliament again. By the way, Lalage, now that you're turning your attention to church affairs wouldn't it be as well to change the name of the society again. You might call it the Episcopal Election Association. E. E. A. would look well at the head of your notepaper and might be worked up into a monogram."

"I daresay we shall make a change," said Lalage, "but if we do we'll be a guild, not a society or an association. Guild is the proper word for anything connected with the church, or high-class furniture, or art needlework. Selby-Harrison will look into the matter for us. But in any case it will be all right about you. You'll still be a life member. Come along, Hilda. We have a lot of people to see before we start. I have to give out badges to about fifty new members."

"Will that be necessary now?" I asked.

"Of course. If anything, more."

"But if you're changing the name of the society?"

"That won't matter in the least. Do come on, Hilda. We shan't have time if you dawdle on here. In any case Pussy will have to pack our clothes for us."

They swept out of the room. Miss Pettigrew got up and shut the door after them. The Canon was too much upset to move.

"I congratulate you, Miss Pettigrew," I said. "You've succeeded after all in getting Lalage out of this. I hardly thought you would."

"This," said the Canon, "is worse, infinitely worse."

"I'm not quite sure," said Miss Pettigrew, "about the procedure in these cases. Who elects bishops?"

"The Diocesan Synod," I said. "Isn't that right, Canon?"

"Yes," he said, gloomily.

"And who constitutes the Diocesan Synod?" said Miss Pettigrew.

"A lot of parsons," I said. "All the parsons there are, and some dear old country gentlemen of blameless lives. Just the people really to appreciate Lalage."

"We shall have more trouble," said Miss Pettigrew.

"Plenty," I said. "And Thormanby will be in the thick of it. He won't find it so easy to wash his hands this time."

"Nor will you," said Miss Pettigrew smiling, but I think maliciously.

"I shall simply stay here," I said, "and go on having influenza."

I have so much respect for Miss Pettigrew that I do not like to say she grinned at me but she certainly employed a smile which an enemy might have described as a grin.

"The election here," she said, "your election takes place, as I understand, early next week. Your mother will expect you home after that."

"Mothers are often disappointed," I said. "Look at Hilda's, for instance. And in any case my mother is a reasonable woman. She'll respect a doctor's certificate, and McMeekin will give me that if I ask him."

The Canon had evidently not been attending to what Miss Pettigrew and I were saying to one another. He broke in rather abruptly:

"Is there any other place more attractive than Brazil?"

He was thinking of Lalage, not of himself. I do not think he cared much where he went so long as he got far from Ireland.

"There are, I believe," I said, "still a few cannibal tribes left in the interior of Borneo. There are certainly head hunters there."

"Dyaks," said Miss Pettigrew.

"I might try her with them," said the Canon.

"If Miss Pettigrew," I suggested, "will manage Hilda's mother, the thing might possibly be arranged. Selby-Harrison could practise being a missionary."

"I shouldn't like Hilda to be eaten," said Miss Pettigrew.

"There's no fear of that," I said. "Lalage is well able to protect her from any cannibal."

"I'll make the offer," said the Canon. "Anything would be better than having Lalage attempting to make speeches at the Diocesan Synod."

Miss Pettigrew had her packing to do and left shortly afterward. The Canon, who seemed to be really depressed, sat on with me and made plans for Lalage's immediate future. From time to time, after I exposed the hollow mockery of each plan, he complained of the tyranny of circumstance.

"If only the bishop hadn't died," he said.

The dregs of the influenza were still hanging about me. I lost my temper with the Canon in the end.

"If only," I said, "you'd brought up Lalage properly."

"I tried governesses," he said, "and I tried school."

"The only thing you did not try," I said, "was what the Archdeacon recommended, a firm hand."

"The Archdeacon never married," said the Canon. "I'm often sorry he didn't. He wouldn't say things like that if he had a child of his own."

CHAPTER XVII

There was a great deal of angry feeling in Ballygore and indeed all through the constituency when Lalage went home. It was generally believed that O'Donoghue, Vittie, and I had somehow driven her away, but this was quite unjust to us and we all three felt it. We felt it particularly when, one night at about twelve o'clock, a large crowd visited us in turn and groaned under our windows. O'Donoghue and Vittie, with a view to ingratiating themselves with the electors, wrote letters to the papers solemnly declaring that they sincerely wished Lalage to return. Nobody believed them. Lalage's teaching had sunk so deep into the popular mind that nobody would have believed anything O'Donoghue and Vittie said even if they had sworn its truth. Titherington, who was beginning to recover, published a counter blast to their letters. He was always quick to seize opportunities and he hoped to increase my popularity by associating me closely with Lalage. He said that I had originally brought her to Ballygore and he left it to be understood that I was an ardent member of the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying. Unfortunately nobody believed him. Lalage's crusade had produced an extraordinary effect. Nobody any longer believed anything, not even the advertisements. My nurse, among others, became affected with the prevailing feeling of scepticism and refused to accept my word for it that I was still seriously ill. Even when I succeeded, by placing it against the hot water bottle in the bottom of my bed, in running up her thermometer to 103 degrees, she merely smiled. And yet a temperature of that kind ought to have convinced her that I really had violent pains somewhere.

The election itself showed unmistakably the popular hatred of public lying. There were just over four thousand electors in the division, but only 530 of them recorded their votes. A good many more, nearly a thousand more, went to the polling booths and deliberately spoiled their voting papers. The returning officer, who kindly came round to my hotel to announce the result, told me that he had never seen so many spoiled votes at any election. The usual way of invalidating the voting paper was to bracket the three names and write "All of them liars" across the paper. Sometimes the word "liars" was qualified by a profane adjective. Sometimes distinctions were made between the candidates and one of us was declared to be a more skilful or determined liar than the other two. O'Donoghue was sometimes placed in the position of the superlative degree of comparison. So was I. But Vittie suffered most frequently in this way. Lalage had always displayed a special virulence in dealing with Vittie's public utterances. The remaining voters, 2470 of them or thereabouts, made a silent protest against our deceitfulness by staying away from the polling booths altogether.

O'Donoghue was elected. He secured 262 of the votes which were not spoiled. I ran him very close, having 260 votes to my credit. Vittie came a bad third, with only eight votes. Vittie, as Titherington told me from the first, never had a chance of success. He was only nominated in the hope that he might take some votes away from me. I hope his friends were satisfied with the result. Three of his eight votes would have given me a majority. Titherington wrote me a long letter some time afterward, as soon, in fact, as he was well enough to do sums. He said that originally, before Lalage came on the scene, I had 1800 firm and reliable supporters, men who would have walked miles through snowstorms to cast their votes for me. O'Donoghue had about the same number who would have acted with equal self-denial on his behalf. Vittie was tolerably sure of two hundred voters and there were about two hundred others who hesitated between Vittie and me, but would rather cut off their right hands than vote for O'Donoghue. I ought, therefore, to have been elected, and I would have been elected, if Lalage had not turned the minds of the voters away from serious political thought. "I do not know," Titherington wrote in a sort of parenthesis, "whether these women hope to advance their cause by tactics of this kind. If they do they are making a bad mistake. No right-thinking man will ever consent to the enfranchisement of a sex capable of treating political life with the levity displayed here by Miss Beresford." It is very curious how hard Titherington finds it to believe that he has made a mistake. He will probably go down to his grave maintaining that the letters A.S.P.L. stand for woman's suffrage, although I pointed out to him more than once that they do not.

The latter part of Titherington's letter was devoted to a carefully reasoned explanation of the actual victory of O'Donoghue. He accounted for it in two ways. O'Donoghue's supporters, being inferior in education and general intelligence to mine, were less likely to be affected by new and heretical doctrines such as Lalage's. A certain amount of mental activity is required in order to go wrong. Also, Lalage's professed admiration for truth made its strongest appeal to my supporters, because O'Donoghue's friends were naturally addicted to lying and loved falsehood for its own sake. My side was, in fact, beaten—I have noticed that this is the case in many elections—because it was intellectually and morally the better side. This theory would have been very consoling to me if I had wanted consolation. I did not. I was far from grudging O'Donoghue his victory. He, so far as I can learn, is just the man to enjoy hearing other people make long speeches. I have never developed a taste for that form of amusement.

The day after the declaration of the result of the election a really serious misfortune befell me. McMeekin himself took influenza. There was a time when I wished very much to hear that he was writhing in the grip of the disease. But those feelings had long passed away from my mind. I no longer wished any ill to McMeekin. I valued him highly as a medical attendant, and I particularly needed his skill just when he was snatched away from me, because my nurse was becoming restive. She hinted at first, and then roundly asserted that I was perfectly well. Nothing but McMeekin's

determined diagnosis of obscure affections of my heart, lungs, and viscera kept her to her duties. She made more than one attempt to take me out for a drive. I resisted her, knowing that a drive would, in the end, take me to the railway station and from that home to be embroiled in the contest between Lalage and the Diocesan Synod. I had a letter from my mother urging me to return home at once and hinting at the possibility of unpleasantness over the election of the new bishop. This made me the more determined to stay where I was, and so McMeekin's illness was a very serious blow to me.

I satisfied myself by inquiry that he was not likely to get well immediately and then I sent for another doctor. This man turned out to be one of my original supporters and I think his feelings must have been hurt by my calling in McMeekin. He had also, I could see, been greatly influenced by Lalage. He told me, with insulting directness of speech, that there was nothing the matter with me. I could not remember the names of the diseases which McMeekin said I had or might develop. The nurse, who could have remembered them if she liked, would not. The new doctor, an aggressive, red-faced young man, repeated his statement that I was perfectly well. He emphasized it by refusing to take a fee. My nurse, with evident delight, packed her box and left by the next train. After that there was nothing for me but to go home.

My mother must have been disappointed at the result of the East Connor election. She believed, I fear she still believes, that I am fitted to make laws and would be happy in the work. But she has great tact. She did not, by either word or glance, condole with me over my defeat.

I also possess a little tact, so I did not exult or express any gratification in her presence. We neither of us mentioned the subject of the election. My uncle Thormanby, on the other hand, has no tact at all. He came over to luncheon the day after I arrived home. We had scarcely sat down at table when he began to jeer.

"Well," he said, speaking in his usual hearty full-throated way, "better luck next time."

"I am not sure," I said, with dignified coolness, "that there will be a next time."

"Oh, yes, there will. 'He who fights and runs away will live to fight another day.'"

I did not see how the proverb applied to me.

"Do you mean the influenza?" I said. "That was scarcely my fault. My temperature was 104."

"All the same," said Thormanby, "you didn't exactly stand up to her, did you?"

I understood then that he was thinking about La-lage.

"Nor did O'Donoghue," I said. "And Vittie really was shamming. Titherington told me so."

"Influenza or no influenza, I shouldn't have sat down under the things that girl was saying about you."

"What would you have done?"

"I should have put her in her place pretty quick. I'm sorry I wasn't there."

As a matter of fact Thormanby had taken very good care not to be there. He had washed his hands and put the whole responsibility on the shoulders of Miss Battersby and Miss Pettigrew. I felt it my duty to bring this home to his conscience.

"Why didn't you come?" I asked. "We'd have been very pleased to see you."

"Peers," he replied, "are not allowed to interfere in elections."

This, of course, was a mere subterfuge. I was not inclined to let Thormanby escape.

"You'll have every opportunity," I said, "of putting her in her place without running your head against the British constitution. She means to take an active part in electing the new bishop."

"Nonsense. There's no part for her to take. That's a matter for the synod of the diocese and she won't be allowed into its meetings."

"All the same she'll manage to get in. But of course that won't matter. You'll put her in her place pretty quick."

Thormanby's tone was distinctly less confident when he next spoke.

"Do you happen to know," he asked, "what she means to do?"

"No, I don't."

"Could you possibly find out? She might tell you if you asked her."

"I don't intend to ask her. I have washed my hands of the whole affair."

My mother came into the conversation at this point.

"Lalage hasn't confided in me," she said, "but she has told Miss Battersby----"

"Ah!" I said, "Miss Battersby is so wonderfully sympathetic. Anybody would confide in her."

"She told Miss Battersby," my mother went on, "that she was studying the situation and looking into the law of the matter."

"Let her stick to that," said Thormanby.

"Are Hilda and Selby-Harrison down here?" I asked.

"Hilda is," said my mother. "I don't know about the other. Who is he or she?"

"He," I said, "is the third member of the committee of the Episcopal Election Guild. He's particularly good at drawing up agreements. I expect the Archdeacon will have to sign one. By the way, I suppose he's the proper man to vote for?"

"I'm supporting him," said Thormanby, "so I suppose you will." I do not like being hustled in this way. "I shall study the situation," I said, "before I make up my mind. I am a life member of the Episcopal Election Guild and I must allow myself to be guided to some extent by the decision of the committee."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Thormanby, "that you've given that girl money again?"

"Not again. My original subscription carries me on from one society to another. Selby-Harrison arranged about that."

"I should have thought," said Thormanby sulkily, "that you'd had warnings enough. You will never learn sense even if you live to be a hundred."

I saw the Archdeacon next day. He tackled the subject of my defeat in East Connor without hesitation. He has even less tact than Thormanby.

"I'm sorry for you, my dear boy," he said, wringing my hand, "more sorry than I can tell you. These disappointments are very hard to bear at your age. When you are as old as I am and know how many of them life has in store for all of us, you will not feel them nearly so acutely."

"I'm trying to bear up," I said.

"Your defeat is a public loss. I feel that very strongly. After your diplomatic experience and with your knowledge of foreign affairs your advice would have been invaluable in all questions of imperial policy."

"I'm greatly gratified to hear you say that. I was afraid you thought I had taken to drink."

"My dear boy," said the Archdeacon with pained surprise, "what can have put such an idea into your head?"

"I couldn't help knowing what was in your mind that day in Dublin when I spoke to you about Lalage's Jun. Soph. Ord."

I could see that the Archdeacon was uncomfortable. He had certainly entertained suspicions when we parted in St. Stephen's Green, though he might now pretend to have forgotten them.

"You thought so then," I went on, "though it was quite early in the day."

"Not at all. I happened to be in a hurry. That is all. I knew perfectly well it was only your manner."

"I don't blame you in the least. Anybody might have thought just as you did."

"But I didn't. I knew you were upset at the time. You were anxious about Lalage Beresford. She's a charming girl, with a very good heart, but----"

The Archdeacon hesitated.

"But----" I said, encouraging him to go on.

"Did you hear," he said, anxiously, "that she intends to take part in the episcopal election? A rumour to that effect has reached me."

"I have it on the best authority that she does."

"Tut, tut," said the Archdeacon. "Do you tell me so? Tut, tut. But that is quite impossible and most undesirable, for her own sake most undesirable."

"We're all relying on you to prevent scandal."

"Your uncle, Lord Thormanby----"

"He'll put her in her place. He's promised to do so. And that will be all right as far as it goes. But the question is will she stay there. That's where you come in, Archdeacon. Once she's in her place it will be your business, as Archdeacon, to keep her there."

"I'll speak to her father about it," said the Archdeacon. "Beresford must put his foot down."

"He's going to Brazil. He told me so."

"We can't have that. He must stay here. It's perfectly impossible for him to leave the country at present. I'll see him this evening."

I told my mother that night that I had studied the situation long enough and was fully determined to cast my vote for the Archdeacon.

"He is thoroughly well fitted to be a bishop," I said. "He told me to-day that my knowledge of foreign affairs would be most valuable to the government whenever questions of imperial policy turned up."

My mother seemed a little puzzled.

"What has that got to do with the bishopric?" she asked.

"The remark," I said, "shows me the kind of man the Archdeacon is. No one who was not full of suave dignity and sympathetic diplomacy could have said a thing like that. What more do you want in a bishop?"

"A great deal more," said my mother, who takes these church questions seriously.

"He also undertook," I said, "to keep Lalage in her place once she is put there."

"If he does that----"

"I quite agree with you. If he does that he ought to be a bishop, or a Metropolitan, if not a Patriarch. That's why I'm going to vote for him."

CHAPTER XVIII

My mother appeared to think that I had grown lazy since I recovered from my attack of influenza. She continually pressed me to take exercise and invented a hundred different excuses for getting me out of doors. When I saw that her heart was really set on seeing me walk I did what I could to gratify her. I promised to go over to the rectory after luncheon on the very next fine day. There seemed no prospect of a fine day for at least a month, and so I felt tolerably safe in making the promise. But there is nothing so unreliable as weather, especially Irish weather. I had no sooner made my promise than the clouds began to break. At twelve o'clock it stopped raining. At one the sun was shining with provoking brilliancy. I tried to ignore the change and at luncheon complained bitterly of the cold. My mother, by way of reply, remarked on the cheerful brightness of the sunshine. She did not, in so many words, ask me to redeem my promise, but I knew what was in her mind.

"All right," I said, "I'm going. I shall put on a pair of thick boots. I should prefer driving, but of course----"

"Walking will be much better for you." "That's just what I was going to say, I shall run a certain amount of risk, of course. I may drop down exhausted. I am still very weak; weaker than I look. Or I may get overheated. Or I may get too cold."

My mother, curiously enough, for she was very fond of me, did not seem frightened.

"McMeekin told me," I went on, "that a relapse after influenza is nearly always fatal. However, I have made my will and I fully intend to walk."

I did walk as far as the gate lodge and about a hundred yards beyond it. It was not in any way my fault that I got no farther. I was actually beginning to like walking and should certainly have gone on if Lalage had not stopped me. She and Hilda were in the Canon's pony trap, driving furiously. Lalage held the reins. Hilda clung with both hands to the side of the trap. The pony was galloping hard and foaming at the mouth. I stepped aside when I saw them coming and climbed more than halfway up a large wooden gate which happened to be near me at the time. The road was very muddy and I did not want to be splashed from head to foot. Besides, there was a risk of being run over. When Lalage caught sight of me she pulled up the pony with a jerk.

"We were just going to see you," she said. "It's great luck catching you like this. What's simony?"

I climbed down from the gate, slowly, so as to get time to think. The question surprised me and I was not prepared to give, offhand, a definition of simony.

"I don't know," I said at last, "but I think, in fact I'm nearly sure, that it is some kind of ecclesiastical offence, perhaps a heresy. Were you coming to see me in order to find out?"

"Yes, That's the reason we were in such a terrific hurry."

"Quite so," I said. "I was a little surprised at first to see you galloping, but now I understand."

"Would it," said Lalage, "be simony to cheek an Archdeacon?"

"It might. It very well might. Is that what you've done, Hilda?"

"I didn't," said Hilda.

"You did, just as much as me," said Lalage, "and it was to you he said it, so he evidently meant you. Not that either of us did cheek him really."

"Why didn't you ask your father?" I said. "He's a Canon and he'd be almost sure to know."

"I didn't like to speak to him about it until I knew what it was. It might turn out to be something that I wouldn't care to talk to him about, something--you know the kind of thing I mean."

"Improper?"

"Not quite so bad as that, but the same sort."

"Risque? But surely the Archdeacon wouldn't say anything the least----"

"You never know," said Lalage.

"And if it had been that Hilda would never have done it."

"I didn't," said Hilda.

"Of course if it's nothing worse than ordinary cheek," said Lalage, "I shouldn't have minded talking to father about it in the least. But I don't see how it could be that, for we didn't cheek him. Did we, Hilda?"

"I didn't," said Hilda.

"If there'd been anything of the other sort about it--and it sounds rather like that, doesn't it?"

"Very," I said; "but you can't trust sounds."

"Anyhow, we thought it safer to come to you," said Lalage.

"That was nice of you both."

"I don't see anything nice about it one way or the other," said Lalage. "We simply thought that if it was anything-- anything not quite ladylike, you'd be sure to know all about it."

I do not know why Lalage should saddle me with a reputation of this kind. I have never done anything to deserve it. My feelings were hurt.

"As it turns out not to be improper," I said, "there's no use coming to me."

I spoke severely, in cold tones, with great stiffness of manner. Lalage was not in the least snubbed.

"Have you any book in the house that would tell you?" she asked.

"I have a dictionary."

"Stupid of me," said Lalage, "not to have thought of a dictionary, and frightfully stupid of you, Hilda. You ought to have thought of it. You were always fonder of dictionaries than I was. There are two or three of them in the rectory. We might have gone straight there and looked it out. We'll go now."

"If it's a really pressing matter," I said, "you'll save a few minutes by coming back with me. You're fully a quarter of a mile from the rectory this minute."

"Right," said Lalage. "Let down the back of the trap and hop up. We'll drive you."

I let down the seat and then hopped. I hopped quite a long way before I succeeded in getting up. For Lalage started before I was nearly ready and urged the pony to a gallop at once. When we reached the house I sent the unfortunate animal round to the stable yard, with orders that he was to be carefully rubbed down and then walked about until he was cool. Lalage, followed by Hilda and afterward by me, went into the library.

"Now," she said, "trot out your best dictionary."

I collected five, one of them an immense work in four volumes, and laid them in a row on the table.

"Hilda," said Lalage, "look it out."

Hilda chose, the largest dictionary and after a short hesitation picked up the volume labelled "Jab to Sli." She stared at the word without speaking for some time after she found it. Lalage and I looked over her shoulder and, when we saw the definition, stared too. It was Lalage who read it out in the end:

"Simony from Simon Magus, Acts VIII. The crime of buying or selling ecclesiastical preferment or the corrupt presentation of any one to an ecclesiastical benefice for money or reward."

I own that I was puzzled. Lalage is a person of great originality and daring, but I did not see how even she could possibly have committed simony. She and Hilda looked at each other. There was an expression of genuine astonishment on their faces.

"Do you think," said Lalage at last, "that the Archdeacon could by any chance have gone suddenly dotty in the head?"

"He was quite sane the day before yesterday," I said. "I was talking to him."

"Well, then, I don't understand it. Whatever else we did we didn't do that or anything like it. Did we, Hilda?"

"I didn't," said Hilda, who seemed as unwilling as ever to answer for Lalage.

"For one thing," said Lalage, "we hadn't got any ecclesiastical preferments to sell and we hadn't any money to buy them, so we couldn't have simonied even if we'd wanted to. But he certainly said we had. Just tell exactly what he did say, Hilda. It was to you he said it."

Hilda, with a very fair imitation of the Archdeacon's manner, repeated his words:

"Young lady, are you aware that this is the sin of simony?"

I took the dictionary in my hand.

"There's a bit more," I said, "that you didn't read. Perhaps there is some secondary meaning in the word. I'll go on: 'By stat: 31 Elizabeth C. Vn. Severe penalties are enacted against this crime. In the church of Scotland simonaical practices----' Well, we're not in Scotland anyhow, so we needn't go into that. I wonder if stat: 31 Elizabeth C. VII runs in this country. Some don't; but it sounds to me rather as if it would. If it does, you're in a nasty fix, Lalage; you and Hilda. Several penalties can hardly mean less than imprisonment with hard labour."

"But we didn't do it," said Lalage.

"The Archdeacon appears to think you did," I said, "both of you, especially Hilda. You must have done something. You'd better tell me exactly what occurred from the beginning of the interview until the end. I'll try and pick out what struck the Archdeacon as simonaical. I don't want to see either of you run in for severe penalties if we can help it. I expect the best thing will be to repent and apologize at once."

"Repent of what?" said Lalage.

"That's what I want to find out. Begin at the beginning now and give me the whole story."

"We drove over this morning," said Lalage, "to see the Archdeacon. I didn't want to go a bit, for the Archdeacon is particularly horrid when he's nice, as he is just at present. But Selby-Harrison said we ought."

"Is Selby-Harrison here?"

"No. He wrote from Dublin. He's been looking up the subject of bishops in the college library so that we'd know exactly what we ought to do."

"He should have looked up simony first thing. I can't forgive Selby-Harrison for letting you in for those severe penalties."

"There wasn't a bit of harm in what he said. It was nearly all out of the Bible and the ancient Fathers of the Church and Councils and things. It couldn't have been simony. You have his letter, haven't you, Hilda? Read it out."

Hilda opened the small bag she always carries and took out the letter. It looked to me a very long one.

"I don't know," I said, "that Selby-Harrison's letter really matters unless you read it out to the Archdeacon."

"We didn't get the chance," said Lalage, "although we meant to."

"Then you needn't read it to me."

"We must. Otherwise you won't know why we went to see the Archdeacon."

"Couldn't you give me in a few words a general idea of the contents of the letter?"

"You do that, Hilda," said Lalage.

"It was nothing," said Hilda, "but a list of the things a bishop ought to be."

"Qualifications for the office," said Lalage.

"And you went over to the Archdeacon to find out whether he came up to the standard. I'm beginning to understand."

"I thought at the time," said Hilda, "that it was rather cheek."

"It was," I said, "but it doesn't seem to me, so far, to amount to actual simony."

"It was a perfectly natural and straightforward thing to do," said Lalage. "How could we possibly support the Archdeacon in the election unless we'd satisfied ourselves that he had the proper qualifications?"

"Anyhow," I said, "whether the Archdeacon mistook it for cheek or not--and I can quite understand that he might--it wasn't simony."

"That's just what bothers us," said Lalage. "Do you think that dictionary of yours could possibly be wrong?"

"It might," I said. "Let's try another."

Hilda tried three others. The wording of their definitions varied, but they were all in substantial agreement with the first.

"There must," I said, "have been something in the questions which you put to the Archdeacon which suggested simony to his mind. What did you ask him?"

"I didn't ask him anything. I intended to but I hadn't time. He was on top of us with his old simony before I opened my mouth."

"You did say one thing," said Hilda.

"Then that must have been it," I said.

"It wasn't in the least simonious," said Lalage. "In fact it wasn't anything at all. It was merely a polite way of beginning the conversation."

"All the same," I said. "It was simony. It must have been, for there was nothing else. What was it?"

"It wasn't of any importance," said Lalage. "I simply said--just in the way you might say you hoped his cold was better without meaning anything in particular--that I supposed if he was elected bishop he'd make father archdeacon."

"Ah!" I said.

"He flew out at that straight away. Rather ridiculous of him, wasn't it? He can't be both bishop and archdeacon, so he needn't try. He must give up the second job to some one or other. I'd have thought he'd have seen that at once."

I referred to the dictionary.

"Or the corrupt presentation of any one to an ecclesiastical benefice for money or reward.' That's where he has you, Lalage. You were offering to present him---"

"I wasn't. How could I?"

"He thought you were, any how, And the reward in this case evidently was that your father should be made into an archdeacon."

"That's the greatest nonsense I ever heard. It wouldn't be a reward. Father would simply hate it."

"The Archdeacon couldn't be expected to understand that. Having held the office for so long himself he naturally regards it as highly desirable."

"What about the penalties?" said Hilda nervously.

"By far the best thing you can do," I said, "is to grovel profusely. If you both cast ashes on your heads and let the tears run down your cheeks----"

"If the Archdeacon is such a fool as you're trying to make out," said Lalage, "I shall simply write to him and say that nothing on earth would induce me to allow my father to parade the country dressed up in an apron and a pair of tight black gaiters."

"If you say things like that to him," I said, "he'll exact the penalties. See stat: 31 Elizabeth C. VII. You may not mind, but Hilda's mother will."

"Yes," said Hilda, "she'll be frightfully angry."

At this moment my mother came into the library.

"Thank goodness," said Lalage, "we have some one at last who can talk sense."

My mother looked questioningly at me. I offered her an explanation of the position in the smallest possible number of words.

"The Archdeacon," I said, "is going to put Lalage and Hilda into prison for simony."

"He can't," said Lalage, "for we didn't do it."

"They did," I said, "both of them. They offered to present the Archdeacon corruptly to an ecclesiastical benefice for a reward."

"It wasn't a reward."

"Lalage," said my mother, "have you been meddling with this bishopric election?"

"I simply tried," said Lalage, "to find out whether he was properly qualified."

"You did more than that," I said; "you tried to get a reward."

"If you take my advice----" said my mother.

"I will," said Lalage, "and so will Hilda."

That threatening statute of Queen Elizabeth's must have frightened Lalage. I never before knew her so meek.

"Then leave the question of the Archdeacon's qualifications," said my mother, "to those who have to elect him."

"Not to me," I said hurriedly. "I couldn't work through that list of Selby-Harrison's. Try my uncle. Try Lord Thormanby. He'll like it."

"There's one thing----" said Lalage.

"Leave it to the synod," said my mother.

"Or to Lord Thormanby," I said.

"Very well," said Lalage. "I will. But perhaps he won't care to go into it, and if he doesn't I shall have to act myself."

"He will," I said. "He has a perfectly tremendous sense of responsibility."

"And now," said my mother, "come along, all of you, to the drawing-room and have tea."

"Is it all right?" said Hilda anxiously to me as we left the room.

"Quite," I said; "there'll be no prosecution. My mother can do anything she likes with the Archdeacon, just as she does with Lalage. He'll not enforce a single penalty."

"She's wonderful," said Hilda.

I quite agreed. She is. Even Miss Pettigrew could not do as much. It was more by good luck than anything else that she succeeded in luring Lalage away from Ballygore.

CHAPTER XIX

I congratulated my mother that night on her success in dealing with Lalage.

"Your combination," I said, "of tact, firmness, sympathy, and reasonableness was most masterly."

My mother smiled gently. I somehow gathered from her way of smiling that she thought my congratulations premature.

"Surely," I said, "you don't think she'll break out again. She made you a definite promise."

"She'll keep her promise to the letter," said my mother, still smiling in the same way.

"If she does," I said, "she can't do anything very bad."

It turned out--it always does--that my mother was right and I was wrong. The next morning at breakfast a note was handed to me by the footman. He said it had been brought over from Thormanby Park by a groom on horseback. It was marked "Urgent" in red ink.

Thormanby acts at times in a violent and impulsive manner. If I were his uncle, and so qualified by relationship to give him the advice he frequently gives me, I should recommend him to cultivate repose of manner and leisurely dignity of action. He is a peer of this realm, and has, besides, been selected by his fellow peers to represent them in the House of Lords. He ought not to send grooms scouring the country at breakfast time, carrying letters which look, on the outside, as if they announced the discovery of dangerous conspiracies. I said this and more to my mother before opening the envelope, and she seemed to agree with me that the political and social decay of our aristocracy is to some extent to be traced to their excitability and lack of self-control. By way of demonstrating my own calm, I laid the envelope down beside my plate and refrained from opening it until I had finished the kidney I was eating at the time. The letter, when I did read it, turned out to be quite as hysterical as the manner of its arrival. Thormanby summoned me to his presence--there is no other way of describing the style in which he wrote--and ordered me to start immediately.

"I can't imagine what has gone wrong," I said. "Do you think that Miss Battersby can have gone suddenly mad and assaulted one of the girls with a battle axe?"

"It is far more likely that Lalage has done something," said my mother.

"After her promise to you what could she have done?"

"She might have kept it."

I thought this over and got a grip on the meaning by degrees.

"You mean," I said, "that she has appealed to my uncle on some point about the Archdeacon's qualifications?"

"Exactly."

"But that wouldn't upset him so much."

"It depends on what the point is."

"She's extraordinarily ingenious," I said. "Perhaps I'd better go over to Thormanby Park and see."

"Finish your breakfast," said my mother. "I'll order the trap for you."

I arrived at Thormanby Park shortly after ten o'clock. The door was opened to me by Miss Battersby. She confessed that she had been watching for me from the window of the morning room which looks out over the drive. She squeezed my hand when greeting me and held it so long that I was sure she was suffering from some acute anxiety. She also spoke breathlessly, in a sort of gasping whisper, as if she had been running hard. She had not, of course, run at all. The gasps were due to excitement and agony.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said. "I knew you would. Lord Thormanby is waiting for you in the library. I do hope you won't say anything to make it worse. You'll try not to, won't you?"

I gathered from this that it, whatever it was, must be very bad already.

"Lalage?" I said.

Miss Battersby nodded solemnly.

"My mother told me it must be that, before I started."

"If you could," said Miss Battersby persuasively, "and if you would----"

"I can and will," I said. "What is it?"

"I don't know. But I can't bear to think of poor little Lalage bearing all the blame."

"I can't well take the blame," I said, "although I'm perfectly willing to do so, unless I can find out what it is she's done."

"I don't know. I wish I did. There was a letter from her this morning to Lord Thormanby, but he didn't show it to me."

"If it's in her handwriting," I said, "there's no use my saying I wrote it. He wouldn't believe me. But if it's typewritten

and not signed, I'll say it's mine."

"Oh, I wouldn't ask you to do so much as that. Besides, it wouldn't be true."

"It won't be true in any case," I said, "if I take even part of the blame."

"But you mustn't say what isn't true."

Miss Battersby is unreasonable, though she means well. It is clearly impossible for me to be strictly truthful and at the same time to claim, as my own, misdeeds of which I do not even know the nature. I walked across the hall in the direction of the library door. Miss Battersby followed me with her hand on my arm.

"Do your best for her," she whispered pleadingly.

Thormanby was certainly in a very bad temper. He was sitting at the far side of a large writing table when I entered the room. He did not rise or shake hands with me. He simply pushed a letter across the table toward me with the end of a paper knife. His action gave me the impression that the letter was highly infectious.

"Look at that," he said.

I looked and saw at once that it was in Lalage's handwriting. I was obliged to give up the idea of claiming it as mine.

"Why don't you read it?" said Thormanby.

"I didn't know you wanted me to. Do you?"

"How the deuce are you to know what's in it if you don't read it?"

"It's quite safe, I suppose?"

"Safe? Safe? What do you mean?"

"When I saw you poking at it with that paper knife I thought it might be poisoned."

Thormanby growled and I took up the letter. Lalage has a courteous but perfectly lucid style. I read:

"Dear Lord Thormanby, as a member of the Diocesan Synod you are, I feel sure, quite as anxious as I am that only a really suitable man should be elected bishop. I therefore enclose a carefully drawn list of the necessary and desirable qualifications for that office."

"You have the list?" I said.

"Yes. She sent the thing. She has cheek enough for anything."

"Selby-Harrison drew it up, so if there's anything objectionable in it he's the person you ought to blame, not Lalage."

I felt that I was keeping my promise to Miss Battersby. I had succeeded in implicating another culprit. Not more than half the blame was now Lalage's.

"The *sine qua nons*," the letter went on, "are marked with red crosses, the *desiderata* in black."

"I'm glad," I said, "that she got one plural right. By the way, I wonder what the plural of that phrase really is. It can't be *sines qua non*, and yet *sine quibus* sounds pedantic."

I said this in the hope of mitigating Thormanby's wrath by turning his thoughts into another channel.

I failed. He merely growled again. I went on reading the letter:

"You will observe at once that the Archdeacon, whom we should all like to have as our new bishop, possesses every requirement for the office except one, number fifteen on the enclosed list, marked for convenience of reference, with a violet asterisk."

"What is the missing *sine qua*?" I asked. "Don't tell me if it's private."

"It's--it's--damn it all, look for yourself." He flung a typewritten sheet of foolscap at me. I picked my way carefully among the red and black crosses until I came to the violet asterisk.

"No. 15. 'A bishop must be the husband of one wife'--I Tim: III."

"That's rather a poser," I said, "if true. It seems to me to put the Archdeacon out of the running straight off."

"No. It doesn't," said Thormanby. "That's where the girl's infernal insolence comes in."

I read:

"This obstacle, though under the present circumstances an absolute bar, is fortunately remedial."

"I wish Lalage would be more careful," I said, "she ought to have written 'remediable.' However her meaning is quite plain."

"It gets plainer further on," said Thormanby grinning.

This was the first time I had seen him grin since I came into the room. I took it for an encouraging sign.

Lalage's letter went on:

"The suggestion of the obvious remedy, must be made by some one, for the Archdeacon has evidently not thought of it himself. It would come particularly well from you, occupying as you do a leading position in the diocese.

Unfortunately the time at our disposal is very short, and it will hardly do to leave the Archdeacon without some practical suggestion for the immediate-remedying of the sad defect. What you will have to offer him is a scheme thoroughly worked out and perfect in every detail. The name of Miss Battersby will probably occur to you at once. I need not remind you of her sweet and lovable disposition. You have been long acquainted with her, and will recognize in her a lady peculiarly well suited to share an episcopal throne."

Thormanby became almost purple in the face as I read out the final sentences of the letter. I saw that he was struggling with some strong emotion and suspected that he wanted very much to laugh. If he did he suppressed the desire manfully. His forehead was actually furrowed with a frown when I had finished. I laid the letter down on the table and tapped it impressively with my forefinger.

"That," I said, "strikes me as a remarkably good suggestion."

Thormanby exploded.

"Of all the damned idiots I've ever met," he said, "you're the worst. Do you mean to say that you expect me to drag Miss Battersby over to the Archdeacon's house and dump her down there in a white satin dress with a wedding ring tied round her neck by a ribbon and a stodgy cake tucked under her arm?"

"I haven't actually worked out all the details," I said. "I am thinking more of the plan in its broad outlines. After all, the Archdeacon isn't married. We can't get over that. If that text of First Timothy is really binding--I don't myself know whether it is or not, but I'm inclined to take Selby-Harrison's word for it that it is. He's in the Divinity School and has been making a special study of the subject. If he's right, there's no use our electing the Archdeacon and then having the Local Government Board coming down on us afterward for appointing an unqualified man. You remember the fuss they made when the Urban District Council took on a cookery instructress who hadn't got her diploma."

"That wasn't the Local Government Board. It was the Department of Agriculture. But in any case neither the one nor the other of them has anything in the world to do with bishops."

"Don't you be too sure of that. I expect you'll find they have if you appoint a man who isn't properly qualified, and the law on the subject is perfectly plain."

"Rot! Lots of bishops aren't married. Texts of that sort never mean what they seem to mean."

"What's the good of running risks," I said, "when the remedy is in our own hands? I don't see that the Archdeacon could do better than Miss Battersby. She's wonderfully sympathetic."

"You'd better go and tell him so yourself."

"I would, I'd go like a shot, only most unluckily he's got it into his head that I've taken to drink. He might think, just at first, that I wasn't quite myself if I went to him with a suggestion of that sort."

"There'd be some excuse for him if he did," said Thormanby.

"Whereas, if you, who have always been strictly temperate----"

"I didn't send for you," said Thormanby, "to stand there talking like a born fool. What I want you to do----"

He paused and blew his nose with some violence.

"Yes?" I said.

"Is to go and put a muzzle on that girl of Beresford's."

"If you're offering me a choice," I said, "I'd a great deal rather drag Miss Battersby over to the Archdeacon's house and dump her down there in a wedding ring with a white satin dress tied round her neck by a ribbon. I might manage that, but I'm constitutionally unfitted to deal with Lalage. It was you who said you would put her in her place. I told the Archdeacon he could count on you."

"I'll see Beresford to-day, anyhow."

"Not the least use. He's going to one of the South American republics where there's no extradition."

"I'll speak to your mother about it."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "Lalage is acting strictly in accordance with my mother's instructions in referring this matter to you. Why not try Miss Pettigrew?"

"I will. Who is she?"

"She used to be Lalage's schoolmistress."

"Does she use the cane?"

"This," I said, "is entirely your affair. I've washed my hands of it so I'm not even offering advice, but if I were you I'd be careful about anything in the way of physical violence. Remember that Lalage has Selby-Harrison behind her and he knows the law. You can see for yourself by the way he ferreted out that text of First Timothy that he has the brain of a first-rate solicitor."

I left the room after that. In the hall Miss Battersby waylaid me again.

"Is it all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Not quite. My uncle is writing to Miss Pettigrew."

"She won't come. I'm sure she won't. She told me herself when we were in Ballygore that for the future she intends to watch Lalage's performances from a distance."

"She may make an exception in this case," I said. "If my uncle states it at all fully in his letter it can scarcely fail to make an appeal to her."

Miss Battersby sighed. She was evidently not hopeful.

"Lalage is such a dear girl," she said. "It is a sad pity that she will----"

"She's always trying to do right."

"Always," said Miss Battersby fervently.

"That's why it's generally so difficult for other people."

"The world," said Miss Battersby, "is very hard."

"And desperately wicked. If it were even moderately straightforward and honest Lalage would have been canonized long ago."

"She's a little foolish sometimes."

"All great reformers," I said, "appear foolish to the people of their own generation. It's only afterward that their worth is recognized."

Miss Battersby sighed again. Then she shook hands with me.

"I must go to Lord Thormanby," she said, "He'll want me to write his letters for him."

"He won't want you to write that one to Miss Pettigrew. He has his faults of temper, but he's essentially a gentleman, and he wouldn't dream of asking you to write that particular letter for him. I don't think you need go to him yet. Stay and talk to me about Lalage and the hardness of the world."

"If he doesn't want me," she said, "I ought to settle the flowers."

It really is a pity that Thormanby will not persuade the Archdeacon to marry Miss Battersby. Besides being sweet and lovable, as Lalage pointed out, she has a strong sense of duty which would be quite invaluable in the diocese. Very few people after an agitating morning would go straight off to settle flowers.

CHAPTER XX

I looked at my watch as I got into my trap and found that it was eleven o'clock, not more than two hours since my uncle's letter had been handed to me at the breakfast table. Yet I felt thoroughly tired. No one who has only just recovered from influenza ought to be called upon to face a crisis. At the best of times a crisis of any magnitude is too much for me. When I am weak anything of the sort exhausts me rapidly. It is most unfair that I should be beset with crises as I am. Other men, men who like excitement and unexpected calls for exertion, are condemned to years of unbroken monotony. I, who desire nothing so much as peace, have tumult and turmoil thrust upon me. I drove down the long avenue of Thormanby Park and determined to get home as quickly as possible. There is a greenhouse at the bottom of our garden which at that time was quite unfrequented because something had gone wrong with the heating apparatus and the more delicate plants had been removed from it. I intended to retire to it as soon as I got home with a hammock chair and a novel. I had every hope of being left in peace for an hour or so.

That was my plan. It proved, as all my plans do, unworkable; but, as is always the case, through no fault of my own. At the gate lodge of Thormanby Park I met Lalage. She was riding a bicycle and jumped down as soon as she saw me. I pulled up my pony, of course. Even if Lalage had not jumped down I should have pulled up the pony. Lalage is a sure harbinger of trouble. Crises attend her course through life. Yet I cannot help stopping to talk to her when I get the chance. I suppose I am moved by some obscure instinct which makes me wish to know the worst in store for me as soon as possible.

"I'm darting on," said Lalage, "to secure Pussy Battersby, but I stopped for a moment to tell you to go straight to the rectory."

"You can't get Miss Battersby now. She's settling flowers."

"I must. She's of the utmost importance. I must bring her back with me."

"Has the Archdeacon arrived unexpectedly?"

"No. What on earth put that into your head? Good-bye."

"Wait a minute, Lalage. Take my advice and don't go on. It's not safe. My uncle is threatening you with all sorts of violence. You can guess the sort of temper he's in."

"Gout?"

"No. Your letter."

"My letter? Oh, yes. I'd forgotten that letter for the moment. You mean the one I wrote to him about the Archdeacon's marriage."

"Now you know why you'd better not go near him for a day or two."

"Silly old ass, isn't he, to lose his temper about that? But I can't stop to argue. I must get Pussy Battersby at once. There isn't a moment to spare."

"If the Archdeacon hasn't turned up, what on earth do you want her for?"

"The fact is," said Lalage, "that Hilda's mother is at the rectory."

"I thought she'd arrive some day. You couldn't expect to keep her at bay forever. The wonder is that she didn't come long ago."

"She travelled by the night mail and was rather dishevelled when she arrived, hair a bit tousled, a smut on the end of her nose and a general look of crinklyness about her clothes. Hilda has been in floods of tears and sobbing like a steam engine all morning."

"I don't wonder at all. Any nice-minded girl would. It can't be pleasant for her to see her mother in such a state."

"Don't drivel," said Lalage. "Hilda isn't crying for that. She's not a perfect idiot, whatever you may say."

"I didn't say anything of the sort. I said she was a nice-minded girl."

"Same thing," said Lalage, "and she's not either the one or the other."

"Then why is she crying?"

"Because her mother is taking her home. That's the reason I'm going for Pussy Battersby."

"She'll be a poor substitute for Hilda," I said. "She'll boggle at simony every time."

"What are you talking about now?"

"Miss Battersby. I'm trying to explain that she'll hardly be able to take Hilda's place as the companion of your revels."

"What I'm getting her for," said Lalage severely, "is to restore the confidence of Hilda's mother. She doesn't trust me one bit, silly of her, isn't it? And she's ragged poor father into a condition of incoherence."

"Will Miss Battersby be any use? I should hardly have thought her the sort of person who would deal successfully

with a frantic mother."

"She's tremendously respectable," said Lalage, "and Hilda's mother will have absolute confidence in her the moment she sees her. Remember how she agreed to that Portugal trip once she knew Pussy was to be with us, and she hadn't even seen her then. When I trot her out there'll be absolutely no further trouble. Good-bye, I must be darting on."

Lalage put her foot on the pedal and balanced the bicycle.

I stopped her again.

"You said something about my going to the rectory," I said. "What am I to do when I get there?"

"Attend to Hilda's mother of course."

"Do you mean that I'm to take a basin of hot water and a sponge and wash her nose? I couldn't possibly. I don't know her nearly well enough. I'd hardly venture to do such a thing to Hilda herself."

"I wasn't thinking of the smut on her nose," said Lalage. "What I want you to do is to keep her in play till I get back. I sha'n't be long, but it's not possible to start Pussy Battersby off on the first hop. She'll want to titivate a little."

"If you think I'll be any use----"

"Of course you will. You're very nearly as respectable to look at as Pussy Battersby."

"I shall hate to see Hilda crying."

"Then cheer her up. Good-bye for the present."

This time Lalage really did mount the bicycle. I drove on in the direction of the rectory, turning over in my mind various plans for keeping Hilda's mother in play. Some of them were very good plans which I think would have been successful, but I shall never be certain about that because I did not have the chance of putting them to the test.

A mile from the rectory gate I met a car. There was a good deal of luggage piled on the well, and two ladies sat together on one side. I recognized Hilda at once. The other lady I supposed, quite rightly, to be her mother. I ought, I saw afterward, to have made some effort, even at that eleventh hour, to keep her in play. I do not think I could have succeeded, but it was certainly my duty to try. My nerve unfortunately failed and I simply drove past, raising my hat and bowing sorrowfully to Hilda.

When the car was out of sight I stopped to consider my position. There was nothing to prevent my returning home at once and settling down, as I had originally planned, in the corner of the deserted greenhouse. My inclination was, of course, to do this, but it occurred to me that it would be a charitable and kindly action to comfort Canon Beresford. He had, so Lalage told me, been reduced to a condition of incoherence by the ragging of Hilda's mother. He was also likely to have been a good deal distressed by the sight of Hilda's tears and the sound of her sobs. He would probably be sorry to lose Hilda. In spite of anything Lalage might say I still believed Hilda to be a nice-minded girl, the sort of girl that any man would like to have staying in his house. For all three reasons the Canon would require sympathy and comfort. I drove on to the rectory.

There I had, once more, to reconsider my position. The Canon was comforting himself. He had, so the maid informed me, gone out fishing. My first impulse was to start for home with a sigh of relief. Then I remembered that some one would have to explain to Lalage and Miss Battersby that Hilda and her mother had really gone. The Canon would not be able to do this because he had gone out fishing before they left. The maid was obviously a stupid girl. It seemed to be my duty to wait for Lalage and tell her, soothingly, what had happened. I went into the Canon's study and made myself comfortable with a pipe.

At about one o'clock Lalage arrived without Miss Battersby. She made no comment at first on the absence of Hilda's mother. Her mind had evidently been turned away from that subject. She flung herself into a chair, and dragged furiously at the pins which fastened on her hat. When she had worked them loose she threw the hat itself on the floor.

"Great Scott!" she said. "I've had a time of it!"

"I rather thought you would."

"Curious, isn't it? For he can be a perfect pet when he likes. Glad I don't get gout."

"You know perfectly well that it wasn't gout which was the matter with him this time."

"It can't have been all my letter, can it?"

"It was," I said.

"Of course I wasn't going to stand that sort of thing," said Lalage.

"What sort of thing?"

"The way he talked, or, rather, tried to talk. I soon stopped him. That's what makes me so hot. I wish you'd seen poor Pussy's face. I was afraid every minute he'd mention her name and then she would have died of shame. That's just the kind of thing which would make Pussy really ill."

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him that it was his plain duty to put the matter before the Archdeacon and that if he didn't do it I should simply get some one else and then he'd jolly well feel ashamed of himself and be afraid to look any one in the face for weeks and weeks. I didn't mention that Pussy was the future wife, of course. I'm much too fond of her to hurt her feelings."

I should have liked to hear a description of the expression on Miss Battersby's face. I should also have liked to hear what my uncle said in reply to Lalage's remarks, but I felt an anxiety so acute as greatly to dull my curiosity.

"Had you any one particular in your mind," I asked, "when you said that you'd get somebody else to go to the Archdeacon?"

"Of course I had," said Lalage. "You."

"I was just afraid you might be thinking of that."

"You'll do it of course."

"No," I said, "I won't. There are reasons which I gave to my uncle this morning which made it quite impossible for me----"

"You're not thinking of marrying her yourself, are you?"

"Certainly not."

"Then there can't be any real reason----"

"Lalage," I said, "there is. I don't like to mention the subject to you; but the fact is----"

"If it's anything disagreeable I'd much rather not hear it."

"It is, very; though it's not true."

"You appear to me to be getting into a tangle," said Lalage, "so you'd better not go on. If you're afraid of the Archdeacon--and I suppose that is what your excuses will come to in the end--I'll do it myself. After all, you'd most likely have made a mess of it."

I bore the insult meekly. I was anxious, if possible, to persuade Lalage to drop the idea of marrying the Archdeacon to Miss Battersby.

"Remember your promise to my mother," I said.

"I've kept it. I submitted the matter to Lord Thormanby just as I said I would. If he won't act I can't help it."

"The Archdeacon will be frightfully angry."

Lalage sniffed slightly. I could see that the thought of the Archdeacon's wrath did not frighten her. I should have been surprised if it had. After facing Thormanby in the morning the Archdeacon would seem nothing. I adopted another line.

"Are you perfectly certain," I said, "about that text? Don't you think that if it's really in the Bible the Archdeacon would have seen it?"

"He might have overlooked it," said Lalage; "in fact, he must have overlooked it. If he'd come across it he'd have got married at once. Anybody can see that he wants to be a bishop."

This seemed unanswerable. Yet I could not believe that the Archdeacon, who has been a clergyman for many years, could have failed to read the epistle in which the verse occurs. I made another effort.

"Most likely," I said, "that text means something quite different."

"It can't. The words are as plain as possible."

"Have you looked at the original Greek?"

"No, I haven't. What would be the good of doing that? And, besides, I don't know Greek."

"Then you may be sure," I said, "that the original Greek alters the whole thing. I've noticed hundreds of times that when a text seems to be saying anything which doesn't work out in practice the original Greek sets it right."

"I know that," said Lalage. "At least I've often heard it. But it doesn't apply to cases like this. What on earth else could this mean in the original Greek or any other language you like to translate it into? 'A bishop is to be the husband of one wife.' I looked it out myself to make sure that Selby-Harrison had made no mistake."

The text certainly seemed uncompromising. I had talked bravely about the original Greek, but I doubted in my own mind whether even it would offer a loophole of escape for the Archdeacon.

"It may," I said, desperately, "merely mean that a bishop mayn't have two wives."

"Do talk sense," said Lalage. "What would be the point of saying that a bishop mayn't have two? It's hard enough to get a man like the Archdeacon to have one. Besides, if that's what it means, then other people, not bishops, are allowed to have two wives, which is perfectly absurd. It would be bigamy and that's far worse than what the Archdeacon said I'd done. Where's Hilda?"

Lalage's way of dismissing a subject of which she is tired is abrupt but unmistakable. I told her that Hilda and her mother had gone.

"That's a pity," said Lalage. "I should have liked to take Hilda with me this afternoon."

"Are you going to do it so soon?"

"The election is next week," said Lalage, "so we haven't a moment to lose."

"Well," I said, "if you're really going to do it, I shall be greatly obliged if you'll let me know afterward exactly what the Archdeacon says."

"I will if you like," said Lalage, "but there won't be anything to tell you. He'll simply thank me for bringing the point under his notice."

"I'm not a betting man, but if I were I'd wager a pretty large sum that whatever the Archdeacon does he won't thank you."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he has a special objection to Pussy Battersby?"

"None in the world. I'm sure he respects her. We all do."

"Then I don't see what you mean by saying that he won't thank me. He's a tiresome old thing, especially when he tries to be polite, which he's always doing, but he's not by any means a fool where his own interests are concerned. He'll see at once that I'm doing him a kindness."

I found nothing more to say, so I left Lalage. I had at all events, done my best. I drove home.

CHAPTER XXI

I was late for luncheon, very late. My mother had left the dining-room when I got home, but I found her and she readily agreed to leave the letters she was writing and to sit beside me while I ate. It was not, as I discovered, sympathy for my exhaustion and hunger which induced her to do this. She was full of curiosity.

"Well," she said, as I helped myself to some cold pie, "what was it?"

"It was Lalage," I said. "You guessed that before I started."

There was a short pause during which I ate some of the cold pie and found out that it was made, partly at least, of veal. Then my mother asked another question:

"Has she hit on anything unexpected?"

"Quite. She wants Thormanby to insist on the Archdeacon marrying Miss Battersby."

Even my mother was startled. She gave utterance to an exclamation. If she had been a man she would have sworn. I soothed her.

"It's not really a bad scheme," I said, "when you get over the first shock. The Archdeacon, it appears, is bound to marry."

"Why?"

"Timothy says so or seems to say so. Perhaps he didn't really. What is the proper, regularly received interpretation of that text which says that a bishop is to be the husband of one wife?"

"There are several."

"The Archdeacon is sure to know them, I suppose."

"Oh, yes. He's certain to know them."

"He'll want them all this afternoon. Lalage is going to him with that text drawn in her hand. She's also taking Miss Battersby, a wedding ring, a cake, and a white satin dress. I'm speaking figuratively of course."

"I hope so. But however figurative your way of putting it may be, I'm afraid that the Archdeacon won't be pleased."

"So I told Lalage. But she's quite certain that he will. I should say myself that he'd dislike it several degrees more than he did the simony. I often think it's a pity the Archdeacon hasn't any sense of humour."

"No sense of humour would enable him to see that joke."

"Thormanby," I said, "has been employed all morning in writing letters and appealing telegrams to Miss Petti-grew; but even if she comes it will be too late."

"I hope Miss Battersby hasn't been told."

"Not by Lalage. She felt that there would be a certain want of delicacy about mentioning the subject to her before the Archdeacon had spoken."

My mother sighed.

"I'm very fond of Lalage," she said, "but I sometimes wish she was----"

"That's just what Miss Battersby was saying this morning. I quite agree with you both that life would be simpler if she was, but of course she isn't."

"What Lalage wants is some steady influence."

"Miss Pettigrew," I said, "suggested marriage and babies. I don't think she mentioned the number of babies, but several would be required."

My mother looked at me in much the same curious way that Miss Pettigrew did on the afternoon when she and Canon Beresford visited me in Ballygore. I felt the same unpleasant sense of embarrassment. I finished my glass of claret hurriedly, and without waiting for coffee, which would probably have been cold, left the room.

I went about the house and made a collection of the articles I was likely to want during the afternoon. I got a hammock chair with a leg rest, four cushions, a pipe, a tin of tobacco, three boxes of matches, and a novel called "Sword Play." With these in my arms I staggered across the garden and made for the nook to which I had been looking forward all day. A greenhouse which is not sacrificed to flowers is a very pleasant place at certain seasons of the year. In Spring, for instance, when the sun is shining, I am tempted to go out of doors. But in Spring there are cold winds which drive me in again. In a greenhouse the sun is available and the winds are excluded. If the heating apparatus is out of order, as it fortunately was in the case of my greenhouse, the temperature is warm without stuffiness. I shut the door, pulled a tree fern in a heavy pot out of my way, and then found out by experiment which of the angles of all at which a hammock chair can be set is the most comfortable. Then I placed my four cushions just where I like them, one under my head, one to give support to the small of my back, one under my knees, and one beside my left elbow. I lit my pipe and put the three boxes of matches in different places, so that when I lost one I should, while searching for it, be

pretty sure of coming on another.

I opened my novel. It was about a gentleman of title who in his day was the best swordsman in Europe. He loved a scornful lady with great devotion. I read a hundred pages with dwindling attention and at last found that I had failed to be excited by the story of a prolonged duel fought on the brink of a precipice under the shadow of an ancient castle from the battlements of which the scornful lady was looking down. I was vexed with myself, for I ought to have enjoyed the scene. I turned back and read the whole chapter through a second time. Again I somehow missed the emotion of it. My mind kept wandering from the lunging figures on the edge of the cliff to a vision of Lalage in a dark green dress speeding along the road on her bicycle.

I laid down the novel and set myself the pleasant task of constructing imaginary interviews between Lalage and the Archdeacon. As a rule I enjoy the meanderings of my own imagination, and in this particular case I had provided it with material to work on much more likely to be entertaining than the gambols of the expert swordsman or the scorn of the lady above him. But my imagination failed me. It pictured Lalage well enough. But the Archdeacon, for some reason, would not take shape. I tried again and again with no better success. The image of the Archdeacon got fainter and fainter, until I could no longer visualize even his apron.

At some time, perhaps an hour after I had settled down, I went to sleep. I cannot fix, or make any attempt at fixing, the exact moment at which the conscious effort of my imagination passed into the unconscious romance building of dream. But I know that the Archdeacon totally disappeared, while Lalage, a pleasantly stimulating personality, haunted me. I may have slept for an hour, perhaps for an hour and a half. Looking back on the afternoon, and arranging its chronology to fit between two fixed points of time, I am certain that I did not sleep for more than an hour and a half. It was a few minutes after two o'clock when I sat down to luncheon. I am sure of this, because my mother's eyes sought the clock on the chimney piece when we entered the dining-room together and mine followed them. It was half-past five when I saw her again in the drawing-room. I am equally sure of this because she kissed me three times rather effusively and I was obliged to look at my watch to hide my embarrassment. Between two o'clock and half-past five I lunched, smoked, read, slept, and played a part in certain other events. This makes it tolerably certain that I did not sleep for more than an hour and a half.

I was wakened by a most violent opening of the greenhouse door and a tempestuous rustling of the fronds of the tree fern which I had moved. Then Lalage burst upon me. My first impulse was to struggle out of my chair and offer it to her. She made a motion of excited refusal and I sank back again. I noticed, while she stood before me, that her face was unusually flushed. It seemed to me that she was passing through what McMeekin used to describe as a nerve storm. I leaped to the conclusion that the Archdeacon had not taken kindly to the idea of a marriage with Miss Battersby.

"How did it go off?" I asked.

"Where's your mother?" said Lalage.

"She's not here. You ought to know better than to expect her to be here. Is she the sort of person who'd waste an afternoon in a disused greenhouse? She's probably doing something useful. Did you ask if she was covering pots of marmalade?"

"I've searched everywhere."

"Never mind. She's certain to turn up for tea."

Lalage stamped her foot.

"I want her at once," she said. "I want to talk to her."

"I'm a very poor substitute for my mother, of course; but if you can't find her----"

"I've something to tell her," said Lalage; "something that I simply must tell to somebody."

"I shall be delighted to listen."

Lalage hesitated. She was drumming with her fingers on the edge of an empty flower pot as if she were playing a very rapid fantasia on the piano. This seemed to me a further symptom of nerve storm. I encouraged her to speak, as tactfully as I could.

"Has Miss Battersby," I asked, "rebelled against her destiny?"

Lalage's face suddenly puckered up in a very curious way. I should have supposed that she was on the verge of tears if there existed any record of her ever having shed tears. But no one, not even her most intimate friend ever heard of her crying; so I came to the conclusion that she wanted to laugh. I felt uneasy, for Lalage usually laughs without any preliminary puckerings of her face.

"Perhaps," I said, "you're thinking of the Archdeacon."

"I am," said Lalage.

She spoke with a kind of gulp which in the case of Hilda would certainly have been a premonitory symptom of tears.

"Did he make himself particularly disagreeable?"

Greatly to my relief Lalage laughed. It was an excited, unnatural laugh; and it was not very far from crying. Still it was a laugh.

"No," she said. "He made himself particularly agreeable, too agreeable; at least he tried to."

Then she laughed again and this time the laughing did her good. She became calmer and sat down on the edge of an iron water tank which stood in the corner of the greenhouse. I warned her of the danger of falling in backward. I also offered her one of my cushions to put on the edge of the tank, which looked to me hard. She laughed in reply. My cigarette case was, very fortunately, in my pocket. I fished it out and asked her if she would like to smoke. She took a cigarette and lit it. I could see that it helped to calm her still further.

"Go on with your story," I said.

"Where was I?"

She spoke quite naturally. The laughter and the cigarette, between them, had saved her from the attack which for some time was threatening.

"You hadn't actually begun," I said. "You had only mentioned that the Archdeacon was, or tried to be, unusually, even excessively, agreeable."

"He was writing letters in his study," said Lalage, "when I knocked at the door and walked in on him. I apologized at once for interrupting him."

"You were quite right to do that."

"He said he didn't mind a bit; in fact, liked it. Then he looked like a sheep. You know the sort of way a sheep looks?"

"Woolly?"

"Yes, frightfully, and worse. If I'd had a single grain of sense I should have bolted at once. Anybody might have known what was coming."

"I shouldn't. In fact, even now that I know something came, I can't guess what it was."

"Instead of bolting I brought out that text of Selby-Harrison's. He took it like a lamb."

"Woolly again, only a softer kind of wool."

"No," said Lalage, "just meekly; though of course he went on being woolly."

"There are several authorized interpretations of that text. My mother told me so this afternoon. I suppose the Archdeacon trotted them all out one by one?"

"No. I told you he took it like a lamb. Why won't you try to understand?"

"Anyhow," I said, "his demeanour was most encouraging to you. I suppose you suggested Miss Battersby to him at once?"

"No, I didn't. I couldn't."

Lalage hesitated again. She was not speaking with her usual fluency. I tried to help her out.

"Something in the glare of his eyes stopped you," I said. "I have always heard that the human eye possesses remarkable power."

"There was something in his eye," said Lalage, "but not that."

"It stopped you though, whatever it was."

"No, it didn't. I wish it had. I might have cleared out at once if it had."

"If it wasn't a glare, what was it? I can't imagine a better opportunity for mentioning Miss Battersby."

"He didn't give me time."

"Do you mean to say he pushed you out of the room?"

"No."

"Did he swear? I once heard of an Archdeacon swearing under great provocation."

"No."

"I can't guess any more, Lalage. I really can't. You'll have to tell me what it was."

"He said he'd get married with pleasure."

"But not to Miss Battersby. I'm beginning to see now. Who is the fortunate lady?"

"Me," said Lalage.

"Good heavens, Lalage! You don't mean to say you're going to marry the Archdeacon?"

"You're as bad as he was," said Lalage angrily. "I won't have such horrid things said to me. I don't see why I should be insulted by every one I meet. I wish I hadn't told you. I ought not to have told you. I ought to have gone on looking

for your mother until I found her."

I was immensely, unreasonably relieved. The idea of Lalage marrying the Archdeacon had been a severe shock to me.

"The Archdeacon's proposal----" I said. "By the way, you couldn't possibly have been mistaken about it, could you? He really did?"

Lalage blushed hotly.

"He did," she said, "really."

"That just shows," I said, "what a tremendous impression you made on him with Selby-Harrison's text."

"It wasn't the text at all. He said it had been the dearest wish of his heart for years. Can you imagine anything more silly?"

"I see now," I said, "why he always took such an interest in everything you did and went out of his way to try to keep you from getting into mischief. I think better of the Archdeacon than I ever did before."

"He's a horrid old beast."

"You can't altogether blame him, though."

"I can.

"You oughtn't to, for you don't know----"

"I do know."

"No, you don't. Not what I mean."

"What do you mean? I don't believe you mean anything."

"You don't know the temptation."

Lalage stared at me.

"I've often felt it myself," I said.

Lalage still stared. She was usually quick witted, but on this occasion she seemed to me to be positively dull. I suppose that the nerve storm through which she had passed had temporarily paralyzed the gray matter of her brain. I made an effort to explain myself.

"You must surely realize," I said, "that the Archdeacon isn't the only man in the world who would like--any man would--in fact every man must, unless he's married already, and in that case he's extremely sorry he can't. I certainly do."

Lalage grew gradually more and more crimson in the face while I spoke. At my last words she started violently, and for an instant I thought she was going to fall into the tank.

"Do be careful," I said. "I don't want to have to dive in after you and drag you, in a state of suspended animation, to the shore."

Lalage recovered both her balance and her self-possession.

"Don't you?" she said, with a peculiar smile.

"No, I don't."

"I should have thought," she said, "that any man would. According to you every man must, unless he is married already, and then he'd be extremely sorry that he couldn't."

"In that sense of the words," I said, "of course I do. Please fall in."

"I daresay that the words don't really mean what they seem to mean," said Lalage. "Lots of those words don't. I must look them out in the original Greek."

After this our conversation became greatly confused. It had been slightly confused before. The reference to the original Greek completed the process. It seems to me, looking back on it now, that we sat there, Lalage on the edge of the water tank, I in my hammock chair, and flung illusive phrases and half finished sentences at each other, getting hot by turns, and sometimes both together. At last Lalage left me, quite as abruptly as she had come. I did not know what to make of the situation. There had been nothing but conversation between us. I always understood that under certain circumstances there is more than conversation, sometimes a great deal more. I picked up "Sword Play," which lay on the ground beside me. It was the only authority to hand at the moment. I turned to the last chapter and found that the fencing professor and the haughty lady had not stopped short at conversation. When the lady finally unbent she did so in a very thorough way and things had passed between her and the gentleman which it made me hotter than ever to read about. I had not stirred from my chair nor Lalage from the edge of the tank while we talked. I was greatly perplexed. It was quite plain the history of the swordsman and his lady was not the only one which made me sure of this--that my love-making had not run the normal course. In every single record of such doings which I had ever read a stage had been reached at which the feelings of the performers had been expressed in action rather than in words. Lalage and I

had not got beyond words, therefore I doubted whether I had really been love-making. I had certainly got no definite statement from Lalage. She had not murmured anything in low, sweet tones; nor had she allowed her head to droop forward upon my breast in a manner eloquent of complete surrender. I was far from blaming her for this omission. My hammock chair was adjusted at such an angle that unless she had actually stood on her head I do not see how she could have laid it against my breast, and if she had done that her attitude would have been far from eloquent, besides being most uncomfortable for me. Still the fact remained that I had not got by word or attitude any clear indication from Lalage that my love-making, supposing that I had been love-making, was agreeable to her.

Nor could I flatter myself that Lalage was any better off than I was. I had fully intended to make myself quite clear. The Archdeacon's example had nerved me. I distinctly remembered the sensation of determining that this one crisis at least should be brought to a definite issue, but I was not at all sure that I had succeeded. The gentleman of title whose exploits filled the three hundred pages of "Sword Play" said: "I love you and have always loved you more than life"; and though he spoke in a voice which was hoarse with passion, his meaning must have been perfectly plain. I had not said, nor could I imagine that I ever should say, anything half so heroic. Had I said anything at all or was Lalage as perplexed as I was? This question troubled me, unnecessarily; for, as it turned out afterward, Lalage was not at all perplexed.

CHAPTER XXII

My mind concentrated on one question: Was I to consider myself as engaged to be married to Lalage? The phrase, with its flavour of vulgarity, set my teeth on edge; but no other way of expression occurred to me and I was too deeply anxious to spend time in pursuit of elegancies. It was absurd that I could not answer my question. A man ought to know whether he has or has not committed himself to a proposal of marriage. The Archdeacon, I felt perfectly certain, knew what he had done. And I ought to know whether Lalage had accepted or rejected the proposal. The Archdeacon can have had few if any doubts when Lalage left him. I made up my mind at last to lay the case before my mother. I determined to repeat to her, as nearly as possible, verbatim, the whole conversation which had taken place in the greenhouse. I knew that I should feel foolish while making these confidences. I should, indeed, appear positively ridiculous when I asked my mother to settle the question which troubled me. But my mother is extraordinarily sympathetic and, in any case, it was better to suffer as a fool than to continue to be the prey of perplexity. I sighed a little when I recollected that my mother had a keen sense of the ridiculous and that my dilemma was very likely indeed to appeal to it.

I found my mother in the drawing-room with the remains of afternoon tea still spread on a small table before her. I had just time to notice that two people had been drinking tea and that the second cup, balanced precariously on the arm of a chair, was half full. Then my mother crossed the room rapidly and kissed me three times. She may have done such a thing before. I think it likely that she did when I was a baby. She certainly never kissed me more than once at a time since I was old enough to remember what she did.

"I'm so delighted," she said, "so very delighted. I can't tell you how glad I am."

This remark, taken in connection with the kisses which preceded it, could only have one meaning. I realized at once that I actually was going to marry Lalage. I was not exactly surprised, but the news was so very important that I felt it right to make absolutely certain of its truth.

"You're quite sure, I suppose?" I said.

"Lalage has been here with me. She has only just gone."

"Then we may regard it as settled."

"You silly boy! Haven't you been settling it for the last hour?"

"That's exactly what I want to know. Have I? I mean to say, have we?"

"Lalage seems to think you have."

"That's all right then. She'd be sure to know."

"How can you talk like that when you've arranged everything down to the minutest details?"

This startled me. I felt it necessary to ask for more information.

"Would you mind recapitulating the details? I'm a little confused about them."

"You're to wait till the Archdeacon is actually bishop," said my mother, "and then he's to marry you."

"Is that your plan or Lalage's?"

"Lalage's, of course. I suppose it's yours too."

"I'm sorry," I said, "to find that Lalage is so vindictive. I hoped that she'd have been more ready to forgive and forget."

"I know what you're thinking about, because Lalage told me. She doesn't mean to be vindictive in the least. She seemed to think----"

"Surely not that the Archdeacon will like it?"

"Hardly that; but that under the circumstances his feelings would be hurt if any one else was asked to perform the ceremony."

"After all," I said, "there's still Miss Battersby. He can't complain."

"She's to be a bridesmaid. So is Hilda, of course."

"Selby-Harrison shall be best man," I said.

"Oh!" said my mother, "I gathered from Lalage that you were to ask----"

"I know she doesn't want me to get into touch with Selby-Harrison. I've been trying to make his acquaintance for years and she keeps on concealing him. But this time I'm determined. I'll have Selby-Harrison or no one."

"I gathered from Lalage that she'd prefer----"

"Very well," I said, "I'll have two best men. I don't see why I shouldn't. Who's the other?"

"Lalage mentioned a Mr. Tithers."

"Titherington is his name," I said, "and if I have him I don't see how I can very well leave out Vittie, O'Donoghue, and McMeekin. I don't know how you feel about the matter, but I rather object to being made a public show of with five best men."

"I'm so delighted about it," said my mother, "that I don't mind if you go on talking nonsense about it all the evening. Lalage will be exactly the wife you want. She'll shake you up out of your lazy ways and make something of you in the end."

"Has she settled that?"

"No. She and I are to have a long talk about that, sometime, soon."

I was about to protest, when the door opened and Miss Battersby staggered breathlessly into the room. She was highly flushed and evidently greatly excited. She made straight for me. I thought she was going to kiss me, I still think that she meant to. I pushed my mother forward and got into a corner behind the tea table. Miss Battersby worked off the worst of her emotion on my mother. She must have kissed her eighteen or twenty times. After that she did not want to do more than to shake hands with me.

"Lalage has just told me," she said, "and I'm so glad. I happened to be at the rectory when she came home. She had been looking for me in the morning, and as soon as I could I went over to her."

"Has she telegraphed to Miss Pettigrew?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," said Miss Battersby; "in fact, I'm sure she hasn't."

"Then I'll do it myself. I don't see why Lalage should be the only one to break the news. I'd send a wire to Hilda too if I knew her surname; but I've never been able to find that out. I wish she'd marry Selby-Harrison. Then I'd know how to address her when I want to telegraph or write to her."

"Won't you stay for dinner?" said my mother to Miss Battersby. "We can send you home afterward."

"Oh, no. The car is waiting for me at the rectory. I told the man to put up. Lord Thormanby----"

"You might break it to him," I said.

"He'll be greatly delighted," said Miss Battersby.

"No, he won't," I said. "At least I shall be very much surprised if he is. He told me this morning that I was to go and muzzle Lalage."

"He didn't mean it," said Miss Battersby.

"Besides," said my mother, "you will."

I reflected on this. My mother and Miss Pettigrew are intimate friends. They must have talked over Lalage's future together many times. I knew what Miss Pettigrew's views were and I suspect that my mother was in full agreement with them. Owing to the emotional strain to which I had been subjected I may have been in a hypersensitive condition. I seemed to detect in my mother's confident prophecy an allusion to Miss Pettigrew's plans. Women, even women like my mother, are greatly wanting in delicacy. I was so much afraid of her saying something more on the subject that I bade Miss Battersby good-bye, hurriedly, and left the room.

After dinner my mother again took up the subject of my engagement.

"You'll have to go over and see Canon Beresford early to-morrow morning," she said.

"Of course. But I know what he'll say to me."

"I'm sure he'll be as pleased as I am," said my mother.

"He won't say so."

My mother looked questioningly at me. I answered her.

"He'll quote that line of Horace," I said, "about a *placens uxor*, but it won't be true."

"What does that mean?"

"A placid wife," I said, "a gentle, quiet, peaceable sort of wife, who sits beside the fire and knits, purring gently. When he has finished that quotation he'll blow his nose and give me the piece out of Epictetus about the 'price of tranquillity.' He'll mean by that, that sorry as he is to lose Lalage, the future will hold some compensating joys. He won't be obliged to dart off at a moment's notice to Wick, or Brazil, or Borneo. The Canon is, after all, a thoroughly selfish man. He won't care a bit about something being made of me by Lalage, and if I try to explain my position to him he'll go out fishing at once."

CHAPTER XXIII

The fuss which preceded our wedding was very considerable indeed. Presents abounded. Even in my house, which is a large one, they got greatly in the way. There was, for instance, a large picture sent by Titherington. I do not think he had any malicious intention. He probably gave an order to a dealer without any details of the kind of work of art to be supplied. It turned out to be a finely coloured photographic reproduction of a picture which had been very popular a few years before, called "The Ministering Angel." It represented a hospital nurse in the act of exulting over her patient. It reminded me so unpleasantly of my time in Ballygore that I gave orders to have it set up with its face to the wall in a passage. There I used to trip over it nearly every day. Canon Beresford's position was worse than mine, for his house was smaller and Lalage's presents were both numerous and larger than those sent to me.

I also suffered great inconvenience from the paperers and painters who came down from Dublin in large numbers and pervaded my favourite rooms. It was my mother who invited them. She said that the house was in a disgraceful condition. Lalage took the keenest interest in these men and their work. She used to come over every morning and harangue them vehemently.

This was some consolation to me for the paperers and painters certainly did not like it. I used to enjoy hearing what they said to each other after Lalage had finished with them. Before and after she dealt with the men she used to consult with my mother about clothes. Miss Battersby was admitted to these council meetings. I never was. Patterns of materials arrived from the most distant shops. Some came direct to my mother. I used to see them piled up behind the letters on the breakfast table. Others came to Miss Battersby, who brought them over in the Thormanby's pony trap. Still more were addressed to Lalage at the rectory. I used to send for these in the morning and it was while she waited for them that Lalage gave the paperers and painters her opinion of their incompetence.

It seemed to me quite impossible that any one, during those frenzied six weeks, could have thought calmly on any serious subject. But Lalage is a very wonderful young woman and my mother is able to retain her self-possession under the most trying circumstances. They managed somehow to snatch an hour or two for that long talk about my future of which my mother had spoken to me. I do not know whether Miss Battersby's advice was asked. Mine certainly was not. Nor was I told at the time the result of the deliberations. That leaked out long afterward, when the wedding was over and we had returned home to settle down, I scarcely hoped, in peace. I suspected, of course, that I should be made to do something, and I was agreeably surprised that no form of labour was directly imposed on me for some time. Lalage, acting no doubt on my mother's advice, decided to shepherd rather than goad me along the way on which it was decided that I should go.

She began by saying in a casual way, one night after dinner, that she did not think I had any real taste for political life. I agreed with her heartily. Then she and my mother smiled at each other in a way which made me certain that they had some other career for me in mind. Shortly afterward they took to talking a great deal about books, especially at meal times, and several literary papers appeared regularly on my study table. I came to the conclusion that they wished me to become a patron of literature, perhaps to collect a library or to invite poets to spend their holidays with us. I was quite willing to fall in with this plan, but I determined, privately, only to become acquainted with poets of a peaceable kind who wrote pastorals or elegies and went out for long, solitary walks to commune with nature. In my eagerness to please Lalage I went so far as to write to Selby-Harrison, asking him to make out for me a list of the leading poets of the meditative and mystical schools. I also gave an order to a bookseller for all the books of original poetry published during that autumn. The number of volumes I received surprised me. I used to exhibit them with great pride to my mother and Lalage. I once offered to read out extracts from them in the evening.

"The bent of your genius," said Lalage, "is evidently literary."

My mother backed her up of course.

"It is," I said, "and always was. It's a great pity that it wasn't found out sooner. Think of the time I wasted in Portugal and of that wretched episode in East Connor. However, there's no use going back on past mistakes."

"They weren't altogether mistakes," said Lalage. "We couldn't have known that you were literary until we found out that you weren't any good at anything else."

"That view of literature," I said, "as the last refuge of the incompetent, is quite unworthy of you, Lalage. Recollect that you once edited a magazine yourself. You should have more respect for the profession of letters."

"Don't argue," said Lalage. "All we say is that if you can't do anything else you must be able to write."

Then the truth began to become clear to me. My dream of a life of cultured ease, spent, with intervals for recreation, in the society of gentle poets, faded.

"Do you mean," I said, "that I'm to----?"

"Certainly," said Lalage.

"To write a book?" I said desperately.

"That's the reason," said Lalage, "why I refurnished your study and bought that perfectly sweet Dutch marquetry bureau and hung up the picture of Milton dictating 'Paradise Lost' to his two daughters."

I have hated that picture since the day it first appeared in my study. I only agreed to letting it in because I knew the alternative was Titherington's hospital nurse. The Dutch bureau, if it is Dutch, is most uncomfortable to write at. There was no use, however, wrangling about details. I brought forward the one strong objection to the plan which occurred to me at the moment.

"Has my uncle been consulted?" I asked. "From what I know of Thormanby I should say he's not at all likely to agree to my spending my life in writing poetry."

"His idea," said my mother, "is that you should bring out a comprehensive work on the economic condition of Ireland in the twentieth century."

"He thinks," Lalage added, "that when you do go into Parliament it will be a great advantage to you to be a recognized authority on something, even if it's only Irish economics."

I knew, of course, that I should have to give in to a certain extent in the end; but I was not prepared to fall in with Thormanby's absurd suggestion.

"Very well," I said, "I shall write a book. I shall write my reminiscences."

"Reminiscences," said Lalage, "are rather rot as a rule."

"The bent of my genius," I said, "is entirely reminiscent."

Rather to my surprise Lalage accepted the reminiscences as a tolerable substitute for the economic treatise. I suppose she did not really care what I wrote so long as I wrote something.

"Very well," she said. "We'll give you six months."

I had, I am bound to say, a very pleasant and undisturbed life during the six months allowed me by Lalage. I did my writing, for the most part, in the morning, working at the Dutch marquetry bureau from ten o'clock until shortly after noon. I soon came to find a great deal of pleasure in my work. The only thing which ever put me out of temper was the picture of Milton dictating to two plump young women who had taken off their bodices in order to write with more freedom. If there are any peevish or ill-humoured passages in my book they are to be attributed entirely to the influence of that picture, chiefly to the tousled look of the younger daughter. The fact that her father was blind was no excuse for her neglecting to do her hair when she got up in the morning.

I have secured, by the help of Selby-Harrison, a publisher for the book. He insists on bringing it out as a novel and refuses to allow it to be called "Memories of My Early Life," the title I chose. "Lalage's Lovers," the name under which it appears in his list of forthcoming fiction, seems to me misleading. It suggests a sentimental narrative and will, I fear, give rise to some disappointment. However, I suppose that the book may sell better if we pretend that it is not true. But in Ireland, at least, this device will be vain. The things with which I deal were not done in a corner. There are many bishops who still smart from Lalage's attack on them, and Titherington, at all events, is not likely to forget last year's epidemic of influenza. I shall, indeed, be very glad if the publisher's ruse succeeds and the public generally believes that I have invented the whole story. Now that the moment of publication comes near and I am engaged in adding a few final sentences to the last chapter I am beginning to feel nervous and uncomfortable. There may be a good deal of trouble and annoyance when the book comes out.

I have set down nothing except the truth and this ought to please Lalage; but I am not at all sure that it will. I have noticed that of late she has shown signs of disliking any mention of the *Anti-Tommy-Rot Gazette* or the campaign of the Association for the Suppression of Public Lying in East Connor. She pulled me up very abruptly yesterday when I asked her what Hilda's surname really is. I wanted it in order to make my book as complete as possible. Lalage seemed to think that I intended to annoy her by talking over past events.

"I wish," she said, "that you wouldn't always try to make yourself out a fool. You've known Hilda intimately since she was quite a girl."

That, of course, was my difficulty all along. I have known Hilda too intimately. If our friendship had been more formal or had begun more formally, I should, at first at all events, have called her "Miss" something instead of simply "Hilda." Then I should not be in my present awkward position.

I am also doubtful about Thormanby's reception of the book. He ought to be pleased, for he appears in my pages as a bluff, straightforward nobleman, devoted to the public good and full of sound common-sense though slightly choleric. This is exactly what he is; but I have noticed that people are not always pleased with faithful portraits of themselves.

The case of the Archdeacon, now bishop, is more serious. He has not yet married Miss Battersby, although Lalage has done her best to throw them together and the advantages of the match become every day more obvious. It is just possible that the publication of my reminiscences may create an awkwardness—a constraint of manner on the part of the bishop, a modest shrinking in Miss Battersby, which will tend to put off the final settlement of the affair. I ventured

to hint to Lalage that it might be well to bring the business to a head, if possible, before my book is published. Lalage expressed considerable surprise.

"What on earth has your book got to do with their marriage?" she said.

I saw no good in anticipating what is likely to be an evil day by offering a premature explanation.

"Nothing," I said, "nothing at all."

"Then why do you want to have them married before the book comes out?"

"I don't," I said. "I merely want them to be engaged. My idea is to give them the book as a wedding present, nicely bound in calf of course."

"Poor Pussy," said Lalage; "I intend to give her something better than that."

Lalage has not read my book. It was a bargain from the very first that neither she nor my mother should ask to see the manuscript. She cannot know, therefore, whether it will be better or worse than the silver teapot which I expect she has in mind for Miss Battersby's wedding present.

Another thing which troubles me is the future of Selby-Harrison. It has been arranged, chiefly by Lalage, that the bishop, who used to be Archdeacon, is to ordain Selby-Harrison as curate assistant to Canon Beresford. There are incidents in the career of Selby-Harrison of which no bishop can be expected to approve. His part in Lalage's various crusades has not hitherto been forced upon the attention of the public. My book will, I fear, make it plain that he was an active power in the various reforming societies which caused so much annoyance to many people. If I could, I would leave Selby-Harrison out of the book altogether, but to do so would render unintelligible the whole sequence of events which resulted from the discovery of that text in First Timothy. Besides, it would scarcely be fair to deprive the young man of the credit he certainly deserves for the masterly way in which he drew up the agreements which Titherington and I signed.

All this causes me to hesitate, even now at the eleventh hour, about publishing the book at all. One consideration, however, decides me to go on and face the consequences, whatever they may be. This is not the kind of book which will encourage Thormanby to drive me into Parliament. That plan, at all events, will be dropped when my reminiscences appear.