

FICTION

George A Birmingham

The Smuggler's Cave

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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The Smugglers' Cave

NOVELS BY
GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

THE SMUGGLERS' CAVE
GOODLY PEARLS
THE GUN RUNNERS
THE GRAND DUCHESS
KING TOMMY
SEND FOR Dr. O'GRADY
GENERAL JOHN REGAN
THE MAJOR'S NIECE
HYACINTH
BENEDICT KAVANAGH

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
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The Smugglers' Cave

By *GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM*

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Limited London*

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An Introduction

Meant to make easy the task of those who review novels without reading them and to awaken the interest of others who read novels without reviewing them.

This is the story of the Hailey Compton Village Pageant.

Pageants, good and bad, great and small, were commonplace affairs a few years ago. Every summer half a dozen of them were widely advertised and probably a dozen more ran blameless courses unnoticed except by those who took

part in them. They were started by enthusiasts, worked up by energetic committees, kept within the bounds of historic possibility by scholarly experts. They came and went, amused a few people, bored a great many and left not a trace of their brief existence behind them.

The Hailey Compton Pageant was staged in a small unimportant village. The people who organised it, the vicar's wife and the local innkeeper, were unknown to fame. It had, at first, no backing in the press except a few paragraphs slipped into provincial papers by Miss Beth Appleby, a young journalist of promise but small attainment. It had, at first, no aristocratic patronage, except the half-hearted support of Sir Evelyn Dent. It began in a casual, almost accidental way.

Yet the Hailey Compton Pageant excited England from end to end, set every club in London gossiping, inspired a spate of articles in the daily papers, smirched the reputation of an earl and went near wrecking, at the next General Election, the prospects of a prominent statesman.

Such are the tricks which destiny, a sportive imp, plays with human affairs. An elderly gentleman, in search of local colour for a perfectly innocent book, visits a remote village. An energetic lady with a taste for theatricals seizes an opportunity for getting up a show. An innkeeper, civil to every one and anxious to be obliging to all possible patrons, sees a chance of making a little money.

What could possibly be less important? Yet out of the activities of these people rose one of the most widely discussed scandals of our time.

Chapter I

It has been said, somewhat bitterly, that the whole south coast of England is now one prolonged watering-place, very horrible because very popular. The bitterness is excusable, but the saying is an exaggeration. There are still some places unvisited by chaps-a-bancs and excursionists, undiscovered, or at all events unused by those who "take the kiddies to the sea" for August.

Hailey Compton is a village which until the other day escaped the curse of popularity. Its good fortune was due partly to the fact that there are no houses or lodgings in it suitable for letting. Nor can any be built for there is no room for building. The village lies in a narrow nook between high cliffs and all the ground is already occupied by fishermen's cottages, with their patches of garden, the church, the vicarage, and the Anchor Inn. It is also--and this helps to account for its escape from the general fate--very difficult of access. The only approach to it is by a steep, sharply twisting lane, with a surface of abominable roughness. Horses descend with extreme difficulty and climb up again only if they are very strong. Motorists shrink from the hairpin bends and the blinding high banks between which the lane zigzags. Even chaps-a-bancs drivers, the gallant swashbucklers of our modern traffic, never venture to take their clients to Hailey Compton.

Nevertheless a car crept down the hill one warm, May morning, a light car, driven by an elderly man who sat alone in it. He went very cautiously, his engine responding to its lowest gear, his foot pressed on the brake pedal, his hands clutching the steering wheel convulsively. This was Sir Evelyn Dent, and the car was a new possession which he had only just learned to drive, indeed had not yet learned to drive without nervousness. The age of sixty-five is rather late in life for acquiring so difficult an art as motor driving.

Sir Evelyn bought this car after the fall of the Government, when he ceased to be a Cabinet Minister. He might not have bought it even then, if he had not lost his seat in Parliament in the disastrous General Election which followed the resignation of the Prime Minister. While still in office, with a salary of some thousands a year to cover expenses, Sir Evelyn owned a large car and was driven about by a competent chauffeur. Having lost his salary and having no longer any official expenses he economised by buying a small car and driving it himself. The plan had certain advantages. He could go driving where he pleased and when. Previously he had gone where the chauffeur, a very superior man, thought a Cabinet Minister ought to go at hours which he regarded as suitable.

The lane twisted on, the gradient becoming steeper and the surface worse. Sir Evelyn ventured from time to time to raise his strained eyes from the road immediately in front of him and glance at the roofs of the houses which lay below, and the sea, blue and sparkling, below them. Each time he looked the roofs and the sea seemed a little nearer, which cheered him; but the descent still twisted before him. He began to wonder whether his nerves would remain under control until he reached the bottom. Sweat broke out on his forehead and trickled into his eyes, cold sweat. His hands on the wheel were moist and cold. On the other hand--such are the compensations which nature arranges--the inside of his mouth became perfectly dry, so that it was painful to swallow. Yet he had to swallow each time he crawled round one of the blind corners and found nothing on the other side.

There was much excuse for Sir Evelyn's nervousness. A highly skilled driver would have disliked the hill. Sir Evelyn was a novice. A reckless youth would have hesitated over it. Sir Evelyn was sixty-five and most unwilling to throw away the few years of life remaining to him. It is greatly to his credit and a proof of the fine qualities which had raised him to the position of Cabinet Minister that he reached the bottom of the hill safely. Passing a row of fishermen's cottages, he crawled, not daring to change gear, till he came to the Anchor Inn. There he stopped. A board, either new or newly painted, announced that James Hinton was licensed to sell beer, spirits and tobacco.

Sir Evelyn passed the tip of a dry tongue across a dry lip. At the moment it seemed to him that beer, even the poorest, thinnest beer, any beer at all, was the best thing the world contained. He left his car and went into the tap-room.

Had Sir Evelyn been capable for the moment of any feeling except a desire for beer he would have been surprised at the tap-room of the Anchor Inn in Hailey Compton. Instead of reeking stuffily of stale beer, the place was fresh, cool and pleasant. Instead of a soiled floor, were clean polished boards. Instead of a messy counter and stained tables there was shining cleanliness. Not such are English inns in remote villages. Though thirsty Sir Evelyn could not help noticing the landlord when he came in. He was not in the least the landlord who might have been expected in such a village. He came from an inner room and greeted Sir Evelyn with respectful courtesy. He was a tall, slim man, neatly dressed, cleanly shaved. He might still have been, what indeed he once was, the valet of a wealthy peer.

"A glass of beer," said Sir Evelyn. "In fact a jug of beer."

The landlord, the James Hinton of the newly painted board, spread out apologetic hands.

"Very sorry sir," he said. "Very sorry indeed, sir; but at this hour---- The law, sir. The law. Most unfortunate, but you know how it is, sir."

Sir Evelyn did know and groaned. He had descended the hill at an unfortunate time, arriving at the Anchor Inn at one of those hours during which, no doubt to the advantage of the souls of Englishmen, the buying of a glass of beer is a breach of the law.

Sir Evelyn's guardian angel, watching from on high, smiled, and no one can blame him. He would have been less and not greater than a mortal if he had not been a little amused. Here was a man who had spent his life in making laws; who had taken a pleasure in that most objectionable occupation; who had given energy and considerable ability to the discovery of new laws, if possible sillier and more vexatious than those already made. Here was this man, parched with thirst, a-quiver with jangled nerves, cut off from the only thing in the world which would do him any good, by one of the very laws which he and his fellows had made. It is true that Sir Evelyn had never been directly and personally concerned with the laws which regulate the sale of beer, but he had been responsible for others quite as idiotic.

And once--the guardian angel sniggered when he remembered this--Sir Evelyn answering a tiresome questioner in Parliament, had said that he saw no reason why any of the existing laws should be repealed.

Here, surely, was an instance of that poetic justice, far too rare in the world, in which all good men rejoice and which angels, guardian and others, can scarce forbear to cheer.

But justice in this world is seldom perfect and even angels sometimes smile too soon. It appeared that James Hinton was no fanatical worshipper of the letter of the law.

"If I might venture to make a suggestion, Sir Evelyn----" he said and paused.

Sir Evelyn was surprised by the use of his name and title. He had never been in Hailey Compton before and this prompt recognition was unexpected. A man may be an ex-Cabinet Minister, may be adorned with a knighthood, may be, as Sir Evelyn was, the son of one earl, brother of another and uncle of a third, may be entitled to be styled the Honourable, besides being a knight; but he does not go about the world with a placard round his neck announcing these glories. He looked sharply at the innkeeper.

James Hinton offered an apologetic explanation of his knowledge.

"I sometimes had the pleasure of waiting on you, sir, when I was first footman in the service of your brother, the late earl."

"What about the beer?" said Sir Evelyn.

He began to feel hopeful. A retired servant is a family friend and ought to have more respect for the memory of a dead master than he has for an existing law.

"If I might venture to suggest, sir----" said Hinton again.

"You may suggest anything," said Sir Evelyn, "except lemonade. That, I cannot stand."

"Nothing would induce me to offer you such a thing, sir. If you'll excuse my mentioning a personal matter, sir, I have lived in good houses, some of the best in England, before coming here, and I'm aware that lemonade--with the possible exception of the home-brewed variety when suffering from influenza----"

"If it's not lemonade," said Sir Evelyn, "what is it?"

"My suggestion, sir--and I hope you will not regard it as unduly familiar from one in my position in life--is that you should be my guest, my private guest, for perhaps ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, and during that time share a jug of beer with me in my little room, my own snugery, behind the bar. There is, of course, no question of payment. Therefore there is no breach of the law."

"But I should like to pay for what I drink," said Sir Evelyn.

He was as thirsty as a man can be, but he shrank from drinking at the expense of a footman.

James Hinton's eyes were fixed on a large photograph of one of England's stately homes which hung, nicely framed, on the wall of the tap-room. He spoke in a tone of reminiscence, as a man does who tells a tale of old times, a tale which

has nothing whatever to do with the life of to-day.

"In the houses in which I used to live, sir, it was customary for guests to offer some slight token of esteem, what is commonly spoken of as a tip, to the servants when departing. There was of course no obligation to give anything. The tip was entirely voluntary, a gift, sir, not a payment, if you catch my meaning."

Sir Evelyn caught it; he was to have his glass of beer in spite of the law, but it was to cost him two and sixpence, at least two and sixpence, perhaps five shillings. In the best houses it is scarcely possible to offer less than five shillings to the first footman.

"Hailey Compton is a very quiet place," said James Hinton a few minutes later when he had filled Sir Evelyn's glass. "I don't know that I ever came across a quieter place. No society, unless you count the vicar and his lady. A very nice gentleman, the vicar, though not very energetic. But perhaps you know our vicar, the Rev. Mr. Eames?"

Sir Evelyn did not and said so, holding out his glass for more beer. If he had to pay five shillings for his drink he felt entitled to quench his thirst.

"Perhaps you know Mrs. Eames, sir," said Hinton, pouring out the beer. "A remarkable lady, Mrs. Eames, if I may say so without disrespect. A very remarkable lady, though a little trying at times to the vicar."

Sir Evelyn took no more interest in Mrs. Eames than he did in the vicar. He was not a rural dean, nor an archdeacon, and his visit to Hailey Compton had nothing to do with the church.

"But of course not, sir," said Hinton. "It's not to be expected that you would know Mrs. Eames or the vicar."

Then he waited, hoping to hear what had brought Sir Evelyn to Hailey Compton. He was not disappointed.

"I understand," said Sir Evelyn, "that there is a remarkable sea cave in this neighbourhood."

James Hinton talked fluently and agreeably about the cave. He described its position and how to get to it. He congratulated Sir Evelyn on having arrived in Hailey Compton at a fortunate hour.

"Not altogether fortunate, sir, as regards the beer. But if you wish to visit the cave you could hardly have come at a better time."

The cave, it appeared, was accessible on foot only between half-tide and low water. At other times it must be approached by boat, and landing, except in calm weather, was difficult.

"According to local tradition, sir, the cave was at one time largely used by smugglers. But no doubt you know more about that than I do."

Sir Evelyn did. He knew more about the Hailey Compton cave, indeed more about all smugglers' caves on our coasts, than any man in England.

Having been forced, by a turn of the political wheel to leave office, he had retired to a pleasant old Manor House, once the property of his aunt, Lady Mildred Dent. It stood surrounded by gardens, some twenty miles from Hailey Compton. It had the advantage of being in the middle of the constituency which had lately rejected Sir Evelyn, which might, he hoped would, ultimately change its mind. There he settled down contentedly enough with his pictures, his old prints, his books and manuscripts, until such time as he could appeal to the voters again.

Sir Evelyn had spent his adult life in making laws and arranging for their administration. It was perhaps not unnatural that he should have cherished a secret love and admiration for law breakers. If a bishop were to tell the naked truth about himself he would probably say that what he looked forward to most in heaven was the chance of intimacy with heretics. A doctor, in hours of relaxation and influenced by good wine, will confess to a liking for quacks and a contempt for orthodox methods of cure.

Sir Evelyn's affections went out to the smugglers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, bold defiers of law every one of them. He had gathered a small library about smugglers and made a collection of pictures and prints illustrating their ways. It was his intention to devote his years, or months, of leisure--the period during which the life of Parliament was denied him--to the production of a complete illustrated history of English smuggling. The thing has never been done, and Sir Evelyn felt it was due to the memory of a number of adventurous men that it should be done sympathetically.

He intended, in course of time, to visit and photograph all the genuine smugglers' caves there were. He had already made a list of them, carefully eliminating those whose connection with smugglers was uncertain. It was chiefly with a view to visiting the caves that he had bought and more or less learned to drive his motor. His plan was to spend the

summer, perhaps several summers, in investigating the caves one by one. During the winter he meant to arrange the material collected, make extracts from books, and in due time actually write the great history.

The Hailey Compton cave, an unquestionably genuine haunt of eighteenth century smugglers, was first on his list. He reached it--as has been already noted--early in May after a drive of some peril.

"Perhaps, sir," said Hinton, "you may be returning here for luncheon after your visit to the cave. I can scarcely recommend it though I shall do my best. This is a poor house, sir, not at all what you're accustomed to. I can scarcely venture to promise more than a slice of cold beef, a cut off the Sunday joint, with some bread and cheese. The cheese, if I may say so, is excellent. But perhaps you will prefer to lunch at the vicarage. Mrs. Eames is a very hospitable lady, sir, and I may take it upon myself to say that she will be delighted to entertain you."

"I shall lunch here," said Sir Evelyn, "on whatever you can give me."

"Very good, sir, I merely mentioned the vicarage because I thought you might like to meet Mrs. Eames. A very remarkable lady, sir."

"I do not want to meet Mrs. Eames," said Sir Evelyn. "And I shall not lunch at the vicarage."

Here Sir Evelyn's guardian angel smiled again. How far these beings arrange our future for us is uncertain, but there is no doubt that they know what is going to happen to us some time ahead. When they hear us asserting confidently that we are going to do something, or not going to do it, they are amused, being aware that our plans have very little to do with what actually happens. Sir Evelyn's angel knew perfectly well that his ward would lunch that day at the vicarage, that he would meet Mrs. Eames, and that consequences of the most unexpected kind would follow. His smile died wholly away when he reflected that it would be his business to extricate Sir Evelyn from the tangled difficulties in which he was soon to be involved, which began with his visit to the Hailey Compton Vicarage.

Chapter II

Sir Evelyn left the Anchor Inn, took his camera from the car and set out on the way which Hinton had described to him.

It was not a very pleasant way. It first passed along the village street which smelt of decaying fish and was strewn with empty lobster pots, broken spars and disused oars. Here he was stared at with unblinking hostility by a number of men who leaned against the walls of cottages with their hands in their pockets. He was surveyed apparently with amused dislike by women who came to the doors with babies in their arms. He would have been giggled at by children if they had not all been shut up at school at that hour.

Having reached the end of the street he skirted a slimy and very smelly boat haven beyond which he reached a space of coarse grass. Here nets were spread out to dry and long rows of geese paraded solemnly. Sir Evelyn picked his way among the nets and tried to be indifferent to the geese which stretched out their necks and hissed at him. Having crossed the grass he climbed the sea wall and dropped down on a stony beach. It was a disagreeable beach covered with round white stones. Some of these were about the size of potatoes. They rolled when Sir Evelyn trod on them and he ran some risk of spraining his ankles. Others were larger, about the size of field turnips, and they were coated with pale green weed. Sir Evelyn slipped when he walked on one of them.

At the back, the shoreward end of the beach, the cliffs rose abruptly to a plateau on which the church stood. A hundred yards or so from the village green was the cave. Sir Evelyn, stumbling doggedly on, reached it slightly out of breath.

A surprise waited him. Under the huge arch which formed the entrance of the cave is a pool, ten or twelve feet deep, large enough to hold a fair sized fishing smack. The rocks at the side of the pool are as steep as if they had been cut away to form a dock or a swimming bath. The water is bright green and so clear that the pebbles at the bottom can be plainly seen.

Sir Evelyn unstrapped his camera, preparing to photograph the entrance of the cave. He saw to his annoyance that he was not alone. A woman was standing at the far side of the pool. She wore a bright red bathing dress and a blue waterproof cap. At the moment when Sir Evelyn caught sight of her she was poised for a plunge into the green water.

An imaginative and slightly short-sighted man might have fancied himself unexpectedly blessed with a vision of a mermaid or some other kind of water nymph. The great arch of the cave, the gloomy hollow beyond it, the clear water and the shining rock, formed a natural and proper haunt for a marine damsel. But Sir Evelyn was not romantic. Men who rise to eminence in politics are almost always realists. And he was not short-sighted. He could see perfectly well that the lady on the rock had a sturdy figure and unusually thick legs. All nymphs, woodland or marine, are slim creatures and young. The lady on the rock was not very young, but if he had had any doubt about what she was her greeting would have dispelled it.

"Hallo!" she shouted.

Sir Evelyn, who was a courteous gentleman, took off his hat, bowed and apologised for his intrusion.

"I'm exceedingly sorry for disturbing you," he said. "If I had known you were bathing I should have waited until you had finished."

"Hold on a minute," said the lady. "I can't hear a word you're saying."

She plunged, a neat header with scarcely a splash. He saw the red clad form, curved stiffly from neck to heel, shooting through the clear water. The blue cap emerged, plump arms flashed and splashed. With incredible swiftness and all the grace of a swimming seal she crossed the pool. Grasping the rock at Sir Evelyn's feet she pulled herself half out of the water and looked at him with a gleaming smile.

"This is quite exciting," she said. "I don't think I ever saw anyone here before. Do tell me who you are and what you're doing."

The approach and the questioning which followed it surprised Sir Evelyn. This was not the way in which strangers usually sought to make his acquaintance. But though shocked and a little startled, he was not angry. It is almost impossible to be angry with a dripping, smiling, friendly lady who emerges from the water at your feet.

"My dear lady----" he began, rather pompously but quite kindly.

"My name," she said, "is Eames, Agatha Eames, and my husband is vicar of the parish."

"Dear me!" said Sir Evelyn a little startled.

He had a fairly clear idea in his mind of what the wives of our country clergy are like, an idea formed on the descriptions of these ladies given by our novelists. They are elderly, angular, severe, conventional in their outlook on life and morals, inclined to bitter speaking of a slanderous kind, clothed in body and equipped in mind after the fashion of provincial spinsters of fifty years ago. The lady who looked up at him in no way corresponded to his mental picture of what a country vicar's wife ought to be.

"My name," he said, "is Dent, Evelyn Dent."

"Evelyn Dent! But, of course, Sir Evelyn Dent. *The* Sir Evelyn Dent."

This prompt recognition of his eminence surprised Sir Evelyn. In political circles he was of course well known. Socially, as son, brother and uncle of three succeeding earls, he held a distinguished position. But he scarcely expected to find himself known to a plump lady bathing in a lonely pool. Recollecting Hinton's earlier recognition in the Anchor Inn, it occurred to him that this lady might at one time have been cook in the house of his father, brother or nephew. In the eighteenth century, according to Thackeray, the clergy often married upper servants. For all Sir Evelyn knew they might be doing so still.

With this idea in his mind he smiled in a friendly way. Mrs. Eames, no doubt encouraged by this sign of amiability, climbed out of the pool, sat down on a rock at his feet and began rubbing the water off her legs with curved palms.

"So you know who I am," he said, expecting a confession that she had in other days fried bacon for his breakfast.

But Mrs. Eames had never been a cook and knew Sir Evelyn only as a public man.

"Of course I know who you are," she said. "I have often heard of your splendid work in the Foreign Office--or if it wasn't the Foreign Office, the Treasury."

Sir Evelyn's splendid work had not been done either in the Foreign Office or the Treasury.

"Not quite right," he said.

"A Cabinet Minister, anyhow," said Mrs. Eames, "and frightfully important. Chairman of no end of Royal Commissions."

"Only three," said Sir Evelyn, as if modestly disclaiming a well deserved honour which had not been bestowed on him.

"Three seems no end of a lot to me," said Mrs. Eames. "In fact three is no end of a lot when it's Royal Commissions. Of course three cigarettes wouldn't be much or three apples. Was anyone else ever Chairman of three Royal Commissions?"

Sir Evelyn was not vainer or fonder of praise than most elderly and successful men. Vanity is supposed to be the besetting sin of young women. It is really the devil's most successful lure for old gentlemen, and Sir Evelyn had not escaped it. Long after the other six deadly sins have ceased to be dangerous, when the blood is too sluggish for lust, when bitter experience has taught the folly of gluttony, when there is little left in life with the power to move to anger, whenever avarice--though Byron calls it an old-gentlemanly vice--is a temptation of the past, then vanity attacks a man whose life has given any excuse for it, and he generally falls. With grey hairs and a measure of success there comes to most of us, as to Sir Evelyn, a strong sense of our own importance.

"I wonder," he said modestly, "how you come to be interested in my commonplace career."

"You mustn't think," said Mrs. Eames, "that because I live in Hailey Compton I'm interested in nothing except the parish pump."

"No doubt," said Sir Evelyn, becoming ponderously playful, "so omniscient a lady will be able to guess what has brought me here to-day."

Mrs. Eames took off her bathing cap and ran her fingers through her hair as if deeply pondering. Her hair was red and had been cropped by the village barber, a fisherman and only an amateur at hair-cutting, who had heard of but not actually seen the fashionable bobbing and shingling. The result was comfortable but not becoming. The absence of floating locks made Mrs. Eames's face look bigger than it was and her features did not bear exaggeration well. They gave the impression of having been rather hurriedly put into their places--eyes, nose, mouth and chin--by a modeller who had learnt his art through a correspondence class. The general effect was lumpy and, on closer looking, rather

crooked.

"A little bird whispered to me----" she said.

"A little what?"

"Bird. Of course it wasn't really a bird. And even if it had been it wouldn't have whispered. Birds don't. They twitter. I ought to have said 'Lilith lisped to me----'"

"Lilith!"

"Surely you know 'The Lispings of Lilith,'" said Mrs. Eames.

Sir Evelyn had to confess that he did not.

"Lilith," said Mrs. Eames, "is my niece, Beth Appleby. My name was Appleby before I married poor dear Timothy. She does a column called 'The Lispings of Lilith' which comes out every week in about a dozen provincial papers. Syndicated, you know. I couldn't get on without it. It keeps me up to all that's going on in the great world outside Hailey Compton. Surely you've read it?"

"Never," said Sir Evelyn.

"You'd have liked last week's. There was a Lising about you. 'Lilith lisps,' that's how every paragraph begins, 'that Sir Evelyn Dent, who has recently retired from public life, is devoting his leisure to a study of the history of English smuggling on which he is expected to produce a ----' Now what was it Beth called it? Either a monograph or a *magnum opus*."

Sir Evelyn was aware that some paragraphs, based on hints which he had given himself, had appeared here and there about his devotion to historical research. No doubt "Lilith" or Miss Appleby had copied one of them into the column of provincial lispings.

"Very annoying," he said. "Very annoying indeed. This craze for the publication of the personal affairs of private individuals is one of the crying evils of our time."

But Mrs. Eames, though talkative, was by no means a fool. She knew that Sir Evelyn did not find paragraphs in the papers about his historical work in the least annoying. He liked them. He would have liked them even if they had dealt with his favourite shaving soap. All eminent men like this kind of publicity. If they did not they would not get it. For journalists only advertise those who supply the advertisements. Mrs. Eames was wise enough to know this, but also wise enough to pretend she did not.

"It must be most trying," she said. "That's the worst of being famous. Now what about your photo of the cave? I mustn't interrupt you by chattering here. Would you like me to pose for you as a pirate? I mean to say a smuggler. A real live smuggler seated on a stone at the entrance of the cave would be rather a catch in your book, wouldn't it?"

Sir Evelyn did not think it would, and tried to say so politely.

"I see what you mean," said Mrs. Eames. "My figure, of course. It's too plump for even a well-to-do smuggler. What you want is someone lean. Now if poor Timothy were here---- But he's too mild-looking for a smuggler. It is a pity about my figure."

She surveyed her own legs with a good-humoured smile.

"It's not that," said Sir Evelyn, though it was. "All I meant to say is that I'd like to take a separate photograph of you afterwards, a portrait."

He felt that he had been rude, and there was nothing he disliked more than failing in courtesy to a woman.

Mrs. Eames clapped her hands.

"For publication, of course," she said. "'Mrs. Eames takes a dip at Deauville.' We must say Deauville. Beth knows all about these things, being a journalist herself; and she says that this sort of photo practically must be at Deauville if it's to get into any really smart paper."

"But do you want that?"

"Of course I do," said Mrs. Eames, "and it won't do to say 'Mrs. Eames taking a dip,' even at Deauville. We'll say 'Agatha Eames,' and then if people don't know who I am they'll feel they ought to and pretend they do. Or perhaps

'Lady Agatha Eames.' I don't think there'd be any harm in that, do you? 'Lady Agatha Eames in the smartest of chic bathing suits taking her morning dip at Deauville. Photo'd by Sir Evelyn Dent.' You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"I don't think I should," said Sir Evelyn, rather alarmed. "In fact, I'm sure I shouldn't."

Mrs. Eames was a little downcast, but bore her disappointment well.

"I quite understand," she said. "My bathing dress isn't really chic, and it's centuries old. Of course, you wouldn't like to be associated with it in any public way."

"It's not that," said Sir Evelyn feebly.

"And my figure," said Mrs. Eames. "It is unfortunate about my figure. And you wouldn't believe the amount of exercise I take in order to keep it down. I quite see that it wouldn't do for a Deauville bathing photo. I'll just slip off behind a rock and get my clothes on while you're photographing the cave."

She put on her bathing cap and plunged into the pool again. A few swift strokes took her to the other side. Sir Evelyn watched her disappear into the cave with a bundle of clothes and a bathing towel in her arms. He adjusted his camera and took three photographs.

A quarter of an hour later Mrs. Eames came scrambling over the rocks at the mouth of the pool. She was dressed, but it struck Sir Evelyn when he saw her that her clothes tended rather to emphasise than disguise the defects of figure she complained of. On the upper part of her body she wore a low-necked, entirely sleeveless knitted jumper of a bright yellow colour. A blue cotton skirt barely reached her knees. Her stockings, which seemed stretched to their uttermost, were of the colour called "nude" by hosiers, and it was impossible to help looking at them because her shoes were very white and caught the eye.

"Now for lunch," she said. "You'll lunch with us, of course."

"I fear," said Sir Evelyn vaguely. "I fear that to-day---- Perhaps some other day----"

"Oh, but you must," said Mrs. Eames. "Think of poor Timothy. He hardly ever has the chance of meeting anyone. Not that he wants to, poor darling. In fact he hates it. But it's so good for him."

This tangled account of the vicar's feelings about strangers confirmed Sir Evelyn in his determination to go back to the Anchor Inn for luncheon. He had no wish to force his company on an unwilling host, and did not feel it in any way his duty to be "good" for the Rev. Timothy Eames.

"I have made arrangements," he said a little stiffly, "to lunch at the inn."

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Mrs. Eames, "I'll explain to James Hinton. As a matter of fact, he'll quite expect you to lunch at the vicarage. Everybody who comes to the village does. Not that anyone ever does come. At least, very seldom. But if anybody did--and, after all, you have--he would lunch at the vicarage. James Hinton knows that quite well."

James Hinton did. Sir Evelyn remembered that.

Further refusal became impossible when Mrs. Eames hooked her arm through his and began to tow him across the stony beach.

"There's only cold lamb," she said. "But as soon as we get home I'll dart into the kitchen and make some pancakes. I'm sure you like pancakes. Don't you like pancakes?"

"Oh, quite," said Sir Evelyn.

"And scrambled eggs. Scrambled eggs don't take a minute. After photographing the cave you're sure to be hungry. I know I am. Gladys can run down to the inn for a jug of beer."

"Gladys!"

"Gladys," said Mrs. Eames, "is our cook, which she can't, not even scrambled eggs; and housemaid, which she won't, though she could if she liked. But she can and will go down to James Hinton's for a jug of beer when I tell her to."

Chapter III

"While I'm making the pancakes," said Mrs. Eames, as they crossed the green where the nets and geese were, "you might give Timothy a bit of a talking to; stir him up, you know. I'm always trying to, but I've never succeeded in the least. A word or two from you----"

"I do not think it at all likely that I should influence him," said Sir Evelyn stiffly.

He had no idea of taking on the task of stimulating into activity a lazy country vicar. That was what the Rev. Timothy Eames seemed to be.

"Oh, but you could," said Mrs. Eames. "Force of good example, you know. Tell him you're writing a book, and then, very likely, he'll write one too. He could if he chose. I was sitting beside a Dean once at tea--not quite a first-rate Dean, but still fairly important--and I heard him say to another Dean that there is a corner to be made in the Christological heresies, if anyone cared to seize the chance. I remembered that and told Timothy afterwards, hoping that he might go in for it."

"Might make a corner?"

"Exactly. Just what you're doing, you know. I don't say Christological heresies are as good as smugglers. They're not. But a corner is a corner whatever it's in. My idea was that Timothy might dart in before anyone else tumbled to the chance, and corner those heretics. I know he can read Greek, for I've seen him do it, and so far as I can make out that's the only qualification required. Do try and persuade him, won't you?"

"I'm afraid----"

"You needn't be," said Mrs. Eames. "Timothy won't resent anything you say. He isn't the kind of man who resents good advice. I give him lots and lots, and he's never even annoyed. He simply lies down under it. Such a pity, when he really can read Greek, a thing very few can do."

They passed through the gateway of the vicarage--the gate itself had long ago decayed away--and walked up an ill-kept drive. They found the vicar seated on a rickety chair in front of the house. He had a book in his hand, perhaps a Greek book, but instead of reading it he was gazing at the sea with mild, watery eyes. He stood up as his wife and Sir Evelyn approached, and showed himself to be a tall, gaunt man. He rose slowly to an incredible height, and then seemed to shrink again as he relapsed into his habitual stoop. Mrs. Eames was fluent and explanatory in her introduction.

"This is Sir Evelyn Dent," she said, "and he has come to luncheon. He was a very eminent Cabinet Minister until the Government was hoofed out, which wasn't his fault, and happens to all Governments sooner or later. What do you think Sir Evelyn did then, Timothy? He sat straight down to historical research of the most abstruse kind. There's an example for you! Now, Sir Evelyn, you talk to him about Christological heresies while I go and make the pancakes. You'll hardly believe it, but I've put the advantages of that corner of the Dean's before him dozens of times and he hasn't done a thing yet, not even ragged a Monophysite, though that must be an easy enough thing for anyone who knows Greek."

She ran into the house, leaving two embarrassed men behind her. Sir Evelyn, though a man of the world and practised in dealing with awkward situations, stood tongue-tied. The vicar, sighing gently, looked at his visitor, apparently waiting for the scolding which he felt he deserved. It was he who first broke the silence.

"Do you find the Christological controversies really interesting?" he asked mildly.

"Interesting!" Sir Evelyn was a little irritable. "Good heavens, no! I don't even know what Christological controversies are. I never heard of them till Mrs. Eames mentioned them to me ten minutes ago."

"Oh," said the vicar. "I thought Agatha said that you and some Dean were going into the subject together. I must have been mistaken. But I'm often mistaken, in fact--generally, especially about things Agatha says. She will talk fast and jump about from one thing to another."

"My subject," said Sir Evelyn, beginning to recover himself, "is Eighteenth Century Smuggling."

"And is that interesting? But, of course, it must be to you, or you wouldn't take it up. I suppose that any subject would

be interesting if only one succeeded in getting started, even the Christological heresies. But we needn't talk about them, at least not until Agatha comes back. Indeed we needn't even then unless we want to. She will do all the talking necessary. So restful for us. Don't you think so?"

Sir Evelyn did not. He liked talking, and held the view, taken by St. Paul, that women ought to keep silence. They are at their best when listening, respectfully, to what men like Sir Evelyn have to say.

"The Hailey Compton cave," he began, as if delivering a public lecture, "which I came here to-day to investigate, was undoubtedly much used by smugglers. Its situation, close to a remote village difficult of access, rendered it peculiarly suitable for their lawless trade. Its great size and the ease with which it can be approached from the sea at high tide, help to mark it out as one of the places...."

Long before he had finished what he had to say about the Hailey Compton cave Mrs. Eames came from the house again.

"So lucky," she said. "I found Gladys's aunt in the kitchen, so I just scrambled the eggs and left her to make the pancakes. I expect she can all right. Anyhow, she'll be better than Gladys, and quite as good as me. She has nine children, so she must be able to make pancakes. What I mean to say is that a woman who can bring up nine children can do anything. And now, Sir Evelyn, do tell me all about London. Timothy, darling, get a couple more chairs, and we'll all sit down and be comfortable. We can't have lunch till the pancakes are ready and Gladys has fetched the beer."

The vicar, who seemed obedient in most things though rebellious over the Christological heresies, shambled into the house in search of chairs.

"I'm just longing," said Mrs. Eames, "to hear all about the latest music and art. I really live for music though, of course, I never hear any, and I worship----" She looked round and saw that her husband had not yet come out of the house. "Timothy isn't here, so I don't mind saying that I worship the theatre. I hope you don't think it very wrong of me to say 'worship,' on account of the second commandment, and me being a clergyman's wife. Though, of course, the theatre isn't a graven or molten image, is it? Still, Timothy mightn't quite like my saying it, although it's true. Now what do you think about that, Sir Evelyn?"

Sir Evelyn evaded the point, a thing which his long practice in politics enabled him to do without any difficulty. He did not feel equal to deciding whether the second commandment forbids the worship of the theatre.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that you have not much chance of indulging your taste for the drama down here."

"Oh, but I have," said Mrs. Eames. "Timothy says I indulge it too much. But I always tell him something must be done for the good of the parish, and as he won't, I do. The year before last we had 'Macbeth,' acted entirely by the village people. I do think Shakespeare is so educative, don't you? Last year we had 'Othello,' and now we're getting up 'Hamlet.' Oh, here's Timothy coming back with some chairs. Now we'll be able to sit down and listen to you, Sir Evelyn. I always say that the greatest pleasure in life is hearing a clever man talk, a really clever man. Timothy, darling, Sir Evelyn thinks that we never have any plays here. But we do, don't we?"

The vicar, shambling along with two chairs dragged behind him, stopped when appealed to.

"Plays!" he said. "Oh, yes, certainly. Almost too many of them."

"I always think," said Mrs. Eames, "that Shakespeare is so much better done in the open air by simple country people. More Elizabethan in spirit. I'm sure you agree with me about that."

"I should have supposed," said Sir Evelyn, a little stiffly, "that it would have been difficult to get a satisfactory local Hamlet."

"Not a bit," said Mrs. Eames. "There's a man here called Hinton, the landlord of the inn--but you've seen him, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm sure you agree with me," said Mrs. Eames, "that he's a perfect natural Hamlet--figure, manner, face, voice, everything. You ought to see him in the grave-digger scene--and you shall. This isn't the regular day for rehearsals, but we'll have one after lunch. I'll send Gladys round to tell everyone. It'll be so good for us all to hear what you have to say. I'm doing the Queen, Hamlet's mother, you know. I'd have liked to do Ophelia; but that was scarcely possible with my figure."

She sat down abruptly on a low deck chair which the vicar had dragged out. Her skirt was a barely sufficient covering

when she stood up. It was very insufficient when she sat down in a low chair. She was conscious of that but not at all embarrassed.

"You simply couldn't have an Ophelia with legs like those," she said.

Sir Evelyn agreed with her, but was not obliged to say so, for Gladys's aunt put her head out of the kitchen window and shouted that luncheon was ready.

"Has Gladys come back with the beer?" said Mrs. Eames.

The aunt said she was at that moment coming in through the back door with a jug in her hand.

"I do hope it'll turn out that Gladys's aunt can make pancakes," said Mrs. Eames as they went into the house. "Gladys can't. But these things don't always run in families, which is a pity. If I could write for the papers like Beth--she is my niece, Sir Evelyn, not Timothy's--we might be quite rich. But I can't; which just shows that there's not so much in heredity as some people say, and proves that Gladys's aunt may be able to make pancakes. Anyhow, let's try."

Gladys, a failure as a cook and unwilling to make beds, appeared to be quite incompetent as a parlourmaid. Mrs. Eames was obliged to run round the table with plates and dishes, while Gladys, grinning foolishly, followed her with the beer. This gave Sir Evelyn a chance of resuming the monologue about smugglers' caves which had been interrupted by Mrs. Eames.

"There are," he said, "several hundred so-called smugglers' caves on the south coast of England. Few of them, perhaps not more than eighty or ninety altogether, were actually ever used for the storing of contraband goods. All the rest are spurious, advertised by the local hotel-keepers and railway companies as attractions to the trippers. They are rapidly becoming popular features of our watering-places. Picnic parties throng them. Campers pitch tents in their vicinity."

The vicar, who was drooping slowly at the head of the table, sighed. The thought of picnic parties swarming into the Hailey Compton cave filled him with horror. Mrs. Eames became interested. She was hovering over the cold lamb with a carving knife in her hand. She paused to consider a splendid prospect. Crowds of trippers, if they could be attracted to Hailey Compton, would provide audiences for her plays, and audiences were so far just what the plays lacked. A vision of Hailey Compton as a sort of Shakespearean Ober-Ammergau, floated through her mind.

"The claims of your cave," Sir Evelyn went on, bowing politely to the vicar, "can certainly be substantiated at the bar of history."

A man gains this advantage by being an experienced public speaker. He is able to use phrases like "Substantiated at the bar of history" without suffering, though not, of course, without causing suffering to others. The ordinary speech of an experienced politician contains hundreds of similar phrases; and in his use of them he is like a surgeon who can do the most disgusting things to the human body without the slightest feeling of nausea because he has become thoroughly accustomed to doing them. In the same way a Cabinet Minister can use phrases, not only without self-contempt, but even with a glow of satisfaction, which make other men sick. How splendid it must be to be able to say "The answer is in the negative" without vomiting!

"Timothy," said Mrs. Eames while Sir Evelyn had his mouth full of scrambled egg, "why hasn't our cave been advertised? I'm always telling you that something ought to be done for the parish. As vicar you're simply bound to do something. Here's a splendid opportunity for you. Advertise the cave."

Sir Evelyn held up his hand in gentle but firm protest against Mrs. Eames's interruptions. He still had a great deal to say and he meant to say it all. It was a contest for the privilege of talking, and Sir Evelyn's steady flow of words reduced Mrs. Eames to silence for a time.

Perhaps mere persistence would not have won the victory. Sir Evelyn was more than persevering and monotonous. He was interesting and showed that he possessed a gift for picturesque description. Having proved that the Hailey Compton cave really had been used by smugglers, he went on to give an account, imaginary but based on laboriously studied facts, of the landing of a cargo of contraband goods.

He did it so well that even the vicar was slightly interested. Mrs. Eames, who might have sat down and eaten her luncheon, stood with a dish of potatoes in her hand, thrilled. Even Gladys stopped clattering plates together on the sideboard. Sir Evelyn, like all good talkers, responded to the sympathy of his audience. He spoke better than he ever remembered speaking before.

A dark autumn night. A sighing wind. The hoarse roar of sullen waves dragging at the stones on the beach. A watcher on the tower of the church. The flash of a light far out at sea. A flare on the church tower, subsiding, flaming up again. Glimmering lights in cottage windows. The trampling of heavily booted feet across the beach. The glowing of lanterns.

A gathering of dim figures under the arch of the cave, the sharp rattle of horsehoofs on the stony path which led down the cliff to the village. (Sir Evelyn's own experiences earlier in the day helped him to realise what that descent was like.) A gathering of led pack horses, whinnying and neighing, on the short grass where now the nets are spread. The continuous flashing of a ship's light near at hand. Answering flashes from the mouth of the cave. All the while the hollow booming of the sea. (Sir Evelyn had a good voice, resonant and thrilling like the tones of a 'cello and he was telling his story well.) The appearance of blacker shadows, huge, menacing, against the blackness of the night--the great sails of the lugger. The rattle of blocks and the whining of running ropes. Muttered orders. The slow in-gliding of the boat. The making fast of mooring ropes.

This was part of one of the few chapters in Sir Evelyn's book which was already written. He had worked at it so long and revised it so often that he knew it off by heart. He thought it a fine piece of writing, and it certainly seemed good to his audience. Perhaps it is only because they despise their audiences that our statesmen talk stale jargon in Parliament and on platforms. When they sit down to write, hoping to be read by intelligent men and women, they are very often capable of producing good English.

Chapter IV

There were incidents in the story which might have been cavilled at by a cold-blooded critic. There were, as Sir Evelyn went on, inconsistencies. Men who had tramped across bare rolling stones were splashing knee-deep in water a little later, as if the tide had come in with startling rapidity. On so calm a night there was surely no need for the lugger to carry ballast outboard, though the description of the kegs slung along her weather gunwale helped to produce an atmosphere of very proper desperation. But what do such details matter? Sir Evelyn had achieved the spirit of the smugglers' night landing; worked up to quite unusual emotion he might have gone on to a fight with the preventive officers, but Mrs. Eames, uncontrollably excited, interrupted him at last.

"I see it all," she cried, clapping her hands. "It's wonderful, Sir Evelyn, thrilling. Timothy, we must have a pageant--the Hailey Compton Pageant of Smuggling days. The first of a series of Hailey Compton Pageants of English History. Smugglers! They've never been done before."

To Sir Evelyn her voice was like a jug of cold water suddenly emptied over him. His delight in his own story faded away. He was conscious of nothing except that he had been betrayed into making a fool of himself.

The vicar groaned aloud.

"My dear Agatha----" he began.

"Don't croak, Timothy," she cried, "and don't cavil. This is going to be the most splendid pageant there ever was. The real thing. All the cinemas in the world will reproduce it. We'll have half England here to see it."

"Terrible, terrible," said the vicar.

"We'll make pots of money--for the church of course, Timothy."

"The church doesn't want money," said the vicar; but he knew even while he sobbed out the words, that this was not true. All churches want money, always, and when they get it immediately want more. So do states. If a church or a state could be found which did not want money all sensible men would immediately be received into the one and naturalised into the other.

"Timothy, dearest," said Mrs. Eames, "you know the church ought to be restored. You can't imagine," she explained to Sir Evelyn, "how utterly Victorian our church is. It's quite impossible to have really catholic services in it in its present state. But if we only had money to restore it--and we will, thanks to your splendid idea of a smuggling pageant."

Mrs. Eames, a fervent admirer of all that was best in drama, music and art, was in full sympathy with the picturesque part of the Anglo-Catholic movement in the Church. If she had not been a vicar's wife she would probably have become Catholic without the Anglo. This shows the wisdom of the Church of England in encouraging the marriage of her clergy. A taste for ornamental ecclesiasticism would doubtless lead many women to desert the church of their baptism, if it were not that such women generally get married early in life to curates. And how many of our priests--blessed with similar tastes and an equal share of intelligence--would make their submission to seductive Rome if they were not irrevocably tied to women by a bond which they regard as sacramental?

"God forbid," said the vicar solemnly, "that I should ever be guilty of restoring the church. I have," his voice became penitential, "I have many sins to answer for, but at least----"

Mrs. Eames laid down the potato dish which she still held in her hands, ran to him and flung a plump arm round his neck.

"Timothy, darling," she said, "you haven't any sins or shortcomings. I sometimes think you'd be a better man if you had a few. But you haven't."

"At least," said the vicar, pushing his mouth clear of the hands which covered it, "it shall never be recorded of me that I restored a church. I beg of you, Agatha, to allow me to die without doing that."

He spoke as all good clergy do of church restoration. There is scarcely a vicar or rector to be found in England to-day who does not resent the restoration of his church effected by his predecessor. So far has aesthetic education advanced in our time. So far, but no farther. For there is scarcely a vicar or a rector who does not feel that if the restoration had been left to him it would have been done properly; who would not joyfully undertake a fresh restoration if he saw his

way to getting the money. But Mr. Eames at least was sincere. The furniture and fittings of Hailey Compton church deserved the worst that could be said of them, but the vicar would not willingly have removed a pew or erected a screen.

He got up slowly and sadly, releasing himself from his wife's encircling arms. With a bow to Sir Evelyn he turned to leave the room.

"Timothy, Timothy," said Mrs. Eames, "don't go till you've had a pancake."

She turned on Gladys who was making a cheerful noise by knocking table-spoons against the beer jug.

"Go and get the pancakes at once, Gladys. Timothy, my darling, do stay."

"Not if I'm to be asked to restore a church," he said.

"I'm afraid," said Sir Evelyn, when the vicar had shut the door behind him, "that he doesn't like the idea of a pageant."

"Oh, he's always that way at first," said Mrs. Eames, "when I'm doing something for the parish. He was perfectly miserable for a week when I began the rehearsing for 'Othello,' pretending that he didn't like my doing Desdemona. He was just as bad over 'Hamlet,' though I said I'd give up being Ophelia just to please him. I cannot get him to see that it is his duty in a parish like this to get up something for the people. Don't you agree with me, Sir Evelyn?"

"The country clergy," said Sir Evelyn, "are often reproached with apathy and indifference to----"

"Exactly what I don't want to have said about poor Timothy," said Mrs. Eames. "He's really a saint, you know. At least he would be if he'd only do something, even something wrong. It is such a comfort," she went on abruptly, "to feel that you're going to help us in this pageant, Sir Evelyn."

"So far as my limited knowledge of the subject goes," said Sir Evelyn, a little taken aback, "it is entirely at your disposal, but----"

"Splendid," said Mrs. Eames, "and your knowledge isn't the least limited, so don't be modest. I'll get Beth to write articles for every paper in England boosting the pageant for all she's worth. That's what's called publicity, and it's most important."

"But----" said Sir Evelyn, "excuse my interrupting you, Mrs. Eames, but----"

"Don't go on saying but. You're getting nearly as bad as poor Timothy. Let's make out a list of what we shall want. Ten smugglers would be enough, I should think. Jack Bunce and his son. That's two----" She ticked off the Hailey Compton fishermen on her fingers as she named them. "Tommy Whittle and his three brothers. The youngest is what's called mentally deficient, but that won't matter in a business like this. Old George Mullens--his beard will look splendid. Charlie Mees. He's lame; but I suppose a smuggler might be lame. How many's that?"

"But," said Sir Evelyn, "oughtn't we to begin by considering----"

"One lugger," Mrs. Eames went on. "It may be a little difficult to get a lugger. Ten pack horses. I haven't the least idea what a pack horse is, but I suppose an ordinary horse will do if it's dressed up properly. Everybody will have to dress up of course. Fifty or sixty kegs. I suppose Harrod's will be able to supply us with kegs. They sell everything."

"But," said Sir Evelyn desperately, "where's the money to come from?"

"The public, of course," said Mrs. Eames. "The public is going to pay enormous sums."

"I was thinking of preliminary expenses," said Sir Evelyn.

"Oh, they won't be much," said Mrs. Eames cheerfully, "and I think we'll easily be able to get a grant from some society. Look at the number of societies there are which go in for encouraging artistic handicrafts for the people. Now don't interrupt me, Sir Evelyn. I know just as well as you do that a pageant isn't a handicraft, but it's the same sort of thing. It's just as good as folk dancing anyhow, and there's always money going for that, and folk songs. We'll introduce a folk dance and a few folk songs if necessary. Then there are all the people who want to revive national drama. This is national drama."

Sir Evelyn, though inclined to be critical, was impressed. There are enormous numbers of people, most of them incorporated into societies, who are willing to give money, of which they seem to have more than they want, for just such enterprises as Mrs. Eames's. There ought not to be any great difficulty about getting at them.

"And of course," said Mrs. Eames, "we can get a grant from the County Education Committee."

"That," said Sir Evelyn firmly, "would be totally impossible."

This light-hearted suggestion of pillaging public funds came perilously near being an insult when made to a man who was once a Cabinet Minister. Sir Evelyn resented it and showed his feelings in his voice. Mrs. Eames was in no way abashed.

"I don't see why not," she said. "A pageant is a most educative thing. No one can possibly deny that. Lots and lots of money is spent on things which aren't nearly so educative as our pageant will be. I mean educative in the true sense of the word."

Everyone who says educative and education means the words to be understood in this way. The thought of the "true sense" mollified Sir Evelyn a little. It soothes everyone who has anything to do with education, except the public which has to pay for it. It realises that education in the "true sense" is more expensive than any other. Mrs. Eames saw that she had produced a good effect and pressed her advantage.

"I'm sure we'd get a grant from the committee," she said, "if you asked for it."

Sir Evelyn was most uncomfortably conscious that this was true. A suggestion from him would go a long way with any County Committee, and if he described Mrs. Eames's pageant as an educational enterprise everyone would at once believe him. Unfortunately, having been a gentleman before he became a politician, he was afflicted with a certain sense of honesty.

"It's only a matter of its being put properly to the proper people," said Mrs. Eames persuasively, "and you can do that easily."

"I'd rather give you fifty pounds myself," said Sir Evelyn desperately, "than ask for a grant from any public fund."

"How perfectly sweet of you," said Mrs. Eames. "Now there needn't be any worry about money. There can't be much more wanted. Timothy will be delighted when I tell him. He's always just a little inclined to fuss about money, and these things do cost something, don't they? I wish I could tell him about your fifty pounds at once and make his mind easy. But he's up in the church and I simply daren't disturb him."

"In the church?"

Sir Evelyn was impressed and quite understood that a vicar--admittedly on the verge of becoming a saint--ought not to be disturbed while engaged in prayer and meditation.

"Locked in," said Mrs. Eames. "He always locks himself into the church for a while when I get up anything for the parish. So naughty of him, but that's the kind of man he is. However I'll tell him about your fifty pounds when he comes home in the evening."

Mrs. Eames was perfectly right in saying that her husband had locked himself in. But Sir Evelyn's inference was wrong. Mr. Eames was not engaged in devotional exercises. He was reading the works of the philosopher Epictetus--a very wise choice of literature, for no writer, ancient or modern, has more comfort to offer to those who suffer from the worries and minor ills of life. Nervous irritability, impotent anger and such afflictions of temper are almost invariably soothed by a study of the excellent teaching of Epictetus. Mr. Eames read the philosopher in Greek, which is the best way to read him, for no one can read Greek very fast, and the necessity of going slowly in order to understand the words gives time for the digestion of the matter behind them.

There is nothing irreverent or even improper about reading Epictetus in church. He was a pagan, but so nearly a Christian that the mediaeval monks mistook him for one of the fathers of the church and treated his works as books of devotion. If the monks of the sainted Middle Ages took this view of Epictetus a twentieth century English vicar who reads him in church cannot be regarded as profane.

Mr. Eames, owing to the unrestored condition of his church, was able to make himself fairly comfortable while reading. Hailey Compton parish church was built originally in the Early English style, and was refurnished every hundred years or so in accordance with the taste of each period. The Victorian churchwardens, when their turn came, filled it with large high-backed square pews, put thick cushions on the seats and provided footstools for the convenience of worshippers with short legs. There were fireplaces in some of the pews and occasionally there were arm-chairs. To avoid draughts and secure privacy red curtains were hung round the principal pews. The leading idea was the physical comfort of the worshippers, and the churchwardens seemed to have held with Bishop Blougram that soul was at its best when "body gets its sop and holds its noise." No one need be ashamed of being a disciple of Bishop Blougram, who was a most successful ecclesiastic, on the way to become a Cardinal or perhaps a Pope.

It was in one of these great square pews that Mr. Eames settled down with his Epictetus. He shut the door. He drew the

curtains. He sat at ease in an arm-chair with his outstretched feet on a stool. A thick, though dirty carpet covered the floor. A man might have a worse study if he were content to read without smoking. When Mr. Eames felt that a full appreciation of Epictetus required tobacco he went out and smoked a pipe, sitting on a tombstone.

This pew, the largest and best furnished in the church, had its place in the chancel, close to the altar rails. It had been dedicated a century or so before to the use of the lord of the manor. But for many years there had been no lord of the manor or resident squire in Hailey Compton. The pew was therefore unused except by the vicar when he retired for a while from the turmoil of his wife's activities.

Chapter V

It is a depressing fact and something of a disgrace to human nature that the efforts of those who try to benefit their neighbours are seldom appreciated. Our most active benefactors are generally unpopular. Reformers of a serious kind, those who try to rid the world of beer, tobacco and the opportunity of betting, no doubt expect to be detested, and reckon the dislike they incur as part of the reward of their virtue. At all events they richly deserve all they get in the way of unpopularity. But it is hard on those much less culpable people who merely insist on others amusing themselves in unaccustomed ways that their efforts should earn no gratitude.

Mrs. Eames, for instance, had no objection to beer, often smoked cigarettes and might have bet small sums if the temptation had come her way. She did nothing worse in the village than stir up young men and maidens to act plays; which they ought to have liked doing but did not. She was not herself unpopular, but her plays were, and the announcement that a fresh one was to be started, was received year after year with groans from those likely to be implicated, and from the whole community with a stolid passive resistance, which only energy as unflinching as Mrs. Eames's could possibly have overcome.

She knew all this and fully expected that the pageant prospect would be received by the village people with mutterings of revolt. It was Mrs. Eames, who believed in what she called personal influence, made a rapid visitation of the village, explained the glories and delights of pageants, and was met almost everywhere with gloomy hostility. Only James Hinton of the Anchor Inn gave her the least encouragement, and even his reception of the project would scarcely have been called encouraging except by contrast to the hostility elsewhere. Hinton, at least, did not condemn the pageant without hearing what it was to be. He questioned Mrs. Eames about it and finally promised to think the matter over carefully.

Mrs. Eames summoned a public meeting to consider the pageant and to make the necessary arrangements.

This was always her way of proceeding. She liked public meetings because they gave her opportunities for making speeches, and she believed, like most English people, that a meeting is as necessary to an undertaking of any kind as trousers are to a man. There would be something indecent about a scheme which came into the world not clothed in a resolution of approval, duly passed, not adorned with a properly appointed treasurer and secretary.

A Tuesday ten days after Sir Evelyn's visit was fixed for the meeting and the schoolroom was chosen as the place of assembly.

Mrs. Eames did not expect a large audience. While discussing the meeting beforehand with her husband she was able to predict with complete confidence who would be there.

"James Hinton, of course," she said. "He's your churchwarden."

"I suppose he's more or less bound to be there," said the vicar, "to represent me. I'm certainly not going."

"Of course not, darling. Everyone knows you hate meetings and you wouldn't be any use if you did go. I'm sure the school teachers will be there. They always come to all meetings."

The schoolmaster and his two assistant damsels attended Mrs. Eames's meetings regularly. The schoolmaster liked proposing resolutions. His assistants took it in turns to second anything he proposed.

"And Mrs. Mudge," Mrs. Eames went on, "and Mrs. Purly and----"

She named half a dozen old women, all of them widows, all of them mildly pious, with a vague feeling that attendance at any meeting summoned by Mrs. Eames was a religious act.

"And some of the schoolboys."

"They only go because they're allowed to shout," said the vicar. "All boys love shouting anywhere, and it's particularly pleasant to be able to yell in the schoolroom where they generally have to sit quiet."

"Of course they love shouting, poor dears," said Mrs. Eames, "and I love to hear them. Besides, Timothy, darling, a meeting is so dull if nobody cheers. A speaker does want a little encouragement. Of course it wouldn't do--I know quite well it wouldn't do--but all the same I often think that most sermons would be better--not yours, Timothy--they couldn't be nicer than they are--but most other sermons would be far better if the choir boys were allowed to cheer occasionally."

They'd like it and you can't think how it would encourage the preacher."

"If nobody else goes to your meeting," said the vicar, "and I'm sure nobody else will, I don't see what good it is to hold a meeting at all."

A surprise, staggering in its unexpectedness, waited for Mrs. Eames when she went to her meeting.

The schoolroom was full to its utmost capacity. Indeed it had evidently been more than full at some time shortly before the beginning of the meeting. The schoolboys had been turned out to make room for their elders. Smarting under a sense of injustice they tried to avenge themselves by marching round the building and uttering howls of a lamentable kind outside every window in turn. The schoolmaster, though he deplored their action, refused to interfere, saying that he had no authority outside school hours. Others were less scrupulous about their legal position. Tommy Whittle, a burly fisherman, went out with a stick and was using an argument which the boys thoroughly understood when Mrs. Eames arrived. Fortunately for the success of the meeting Tommy Whittle had made his meaning perfectly plain to the leading boys before he followed Mrs. Eames into the room.

She was obliged to push her way through the door, though everyone tried to make way for her. Those who could not find seats were crowded together at the bottom of the room, and it was almost impossible for them to pack any closer even in order to let Mrs. Eames pass. Once well into the room she made a triumphal progress towards the platform amidst bursts of cheers, stamping of feet and clapping of hands. On the platform, waiting to receive her, were James Hinton and the schoolmaster, whom she expected, and, an astonishing sight, Jack Bunce, one of the oldest and most influential men in the village, fellow churchwarden with James Hinton. He had hitherto been obstinately opposed to all Mrs. Eames's activities. All three stood bowing low as she advanced towards them.

James Hinton, holding up his hand for silence, proposed that Mrs. Eames should take the chair.

This was quite unnecessary. She took it of her own accord, and as a matter of accustomed right, as soon as she reached the platform.

Jack Bunce was seen--but owing to the cheering, not heard--to be making a short speech. It is likely that he was seconding Hinton's proposition, very superfluously indeed, but he may have been saying something else. No one ever knew.

The size of the audience and the warmth of her reception amazed Mrs. Eames. Never before had she seen the people of Hailey Compton stirred to the smallest interest in anything, but there was no doubt about their excited enthusiasm over the pageant. When she began to speak they cheered every sentence.

"In times past," she said, "we have made several efforts to revive drama in our village."

"Three cheers for drama," shouted Tommy Whittle, waving the stick with which he had beaten the boys, and the cheers were given.

"Shakespeare----" said Mrs. Eames.

"Three cheers for Shakespeare," said old Jack Bunce, who had always hated the plays.

"Shakespeare----" said Mrs. Eames, when the shouting subsided.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Hinton, interrupting her, "before we go further I think that the name of the immortal Shakespeare should be received by all standing, in respectful silence."

Only the boys outside broke the silence. They had not been able to hear what Hinton said.

Mrs. Eames, despairing perhaps of ever getting any further with that part of her speech, dropped Shakespeare abruptly and went on to speak of village art in general terms. The applause was loud. She repeated one after another things that she had said hundreds of times and always to people who neither would nor could understand what she meant. She was perhaps no better understood at this wonderful meeting, but what she said was certainly approved.

Her eyes gleamed with delight. Her face was flushed with excitement. She could feel her heart beating in rapid throbs. But she began to get a little hoarse from the effort to make herself heard during the cheering. When she had been talking for half an hour, about art, song and dance, all of the "folk" or superior kind, the audience began to show signs of impatience. Instead of simply cheering, the younger men at the back of the room took to shouting "Pageant! Pageant!" They pronounced the first syllable as if it rhymed with rage, but there was no doubt about what they meant. They wanted to get on, past art of all kinds, to the proper business of the meeting.

There was a good deal to say about the pageant. And Mrs. Eames had matter enough, if properly spun out, to keep her

speech going for another hour. She would have enjoyed making an oration of that length and no doubt would have done it if her voice had held out. Unfortunately for her it failed. Few, if any, human voices would have done any better. The contest between a single speaker and a cheering crowd is unequal and can only have one end. Mrs. Eames sat down at last. Her final words, muttered hoarsely, were, "Smugglers"---"old days"---"Hailey Compton"---"hardy breed of seadogs."

The cheers rose in a fine crescendo to a noise which would have made a German orchestra playing Wagner's music sound restrained and soothing. The people were no doubt very glad that Mrs. Eames had reached the end of her speech, but there must have been something more than simple relief behind their cheering. The ancestors of these fishermen, their grandfathers and great grandfathers a century or so before, had been noted smugglers, famous even in an age when everyone in the south of England smuggled. The deadening tyranny of a hundred years of law and order had tamed and cowed the Bunces and Whittles of to-day, but deep down in them was the old spirit. Mrs. Eames had appealed to sub-conscious selves with atavistic memories.

The surprises of the evening were not at an end. When Mrs. Eames sat down James Hinton rose. He held in his hand a large piece of paper and an observer in the audience might have supposed that he intended to read a speech. But Hinton had a spirit above manuscript and it was very soon evident that the paper contained something far more interesting and more amazing than the notes of any speech.

"A pageant," he said gravely and with quiet dignity, "a great pageant, a pageant displaying one of the most glorious epochs of our national story----" Cheers from such of the audience as had any voices left stopped him for a moment. "Such a pageant as we contemplate cannot be run without the expenditure of considerable sums in preliminary expenses."

At this point of the speech--a point which must be reached in a speech made by someone at every meeting convened for a good purpose--the audience usually becomes uncomfortable and often begins to melt away. But the Hailey Compton people were apparently prepared to face even a subscription list. They cheered again. The reason of this confidence was apparent almost at once. The subscription list had been handed round days before and was already complete.

"I have therefore much pleasure, madam," Hinton went on, bowing low to Mrs. Eames, "in presenting to you a guarantee for the sum of PS51 2s. 6d. together with a list of the names of the guarantors of what I may, perhaps, call the Pageant Fund."

Mrs. Eames gasped. In all her experience of Hailey Compton--perhaps in all the experience of all vicars and vicars' wives of all country parishes--no such thing as this had ever happened. With the utmost difficulty she had managed to extract sixpences and threepences from unwilling people for the expenses of "Macbeth" and "Othello." For "Hamlet" she expected to have to pay entirely out of her own pocket. Yet here, unasked for and unsought, was more than fifty pounds offered to her.

She rose to her feet, tried to find words to express at once gratitude and amazement. She choked, swallowed hard, felt slightly faint and sat down again abruptly. The emotion of the evening had been too much for her. Never before in her whole life had Mrs. Eames been unable to express herself in fluent and ready speech. But then she had never before come face to face with a miracle.

The people cheered again, hoarsely, but as fervently as ever. This time they felt that they were cheering themselves. The PS1 2s. 6d. represented the subscription of the fishermen to the fund. The fifty pounds came from Hinton.

Chapter VI

The meeting in the schoolroom lasted far longer than any meeting in Hailey Compton had ever lasted before. After all possible speeches had been made and votes of thanks proposed to everyone who could be supposed to deserve such a compliment and to a good many people who could not, there remained the business of enrolling the performers for the pageant. This was difficult, for almost everyone present wanted to take part, and the boys, successfully kept out until the speeches were over, managed after that to force their way in and added greatly to the confusion.

It was long after ten o'clock when Mrs. Eames reached home. She hoped but scarcely expected to find her husband waiting for her. Mrs. Eames was a lady who delighted in talking over everything she did at great length, and she had no objection to sitting up until the early hours of the morning. Her husband knew this, as he knew most things about her after twelve years of married life. He disliked talking, which seemed to him a vain amusement, and hated sitting up late. His plan, on the occasions of evening meetings, was to go to bed about nine o'clock and then pretend to be asleep. On the evening of the pageant meeting he really was asleep before his wife came home. This did not altogether save him. Mrs. Eames woke him. It was absolutely necessary to her to discuss the astonishing events of the evening with someone.

"Dearest one," she said, shaking him gently.

He groaned, turned over and buried his face in the pillow.

"Darling Timothy," she said, "you must wake up for just one minute. I want to tell you what happened at the meeting this evening."

She shook him again, not so gently as at first, and he opened his eyes.

"The whole village," she said, "was wildly enthusiastic about the pageant, and James Hinton has promised fifty pounds."

The vicar heard her and was almost startled into complete wakefulness. But the mind, though it works erratically, does work during the interval of half-consciousness between waking and sleeping. What Mrs. Eames said was entirely incredible. The vicar took it for granted that she could not really have said it. He was, he supposed, dreaming a dream rather more absurd than most dreams are.

"Yes, yes," he murmured, "how nice."

This seemed to him, still reasoning confusedly, a very good answer to make to a dream statement of a particularly foolish kind. It was not an answer which satisfied Mrs. Eames. She repeated, in much louder tones, her news about the village people. She added details about the meeting and described the extraordinary enthusiasm of the audience. This time the vicar was almost convinced he was awake and tried to make up his mind to sit up and ask questions. But Mrs. Eames repeated the statement about James Hinton's fifty pounds and the vicar's reason reasserted itself. It could not be true that James Hinton had promised fifty pounds to a pageant. If he seemed to hear his wife saying such a thing it was plain that he was still asleep and dreaming. With a view to getting rid of what threatened to become a nightmare he murmured again:

"How nice! How very, very nice!"

Then he turned over again and shut his eyes firmly. Mrs. Eames gave him up after that and went down to the kitchen. Gladys, incompetent cook and unwilling housemaid, was not the listener she wanted. But Gladys would be better than no one, and would be obliged to listen to any story, however long, told by her mistress.

Here luck favoured Mrs. Eames. She found in the kitchen not only Gladys but the lady whom Gladys called "My auntie," the very lady who had made the pancakes for Sir Evelyn Dent. While Gladys fussed about and made tea for Mrs. Eames the "auntie" listened with real interest to the story of the evening. Her husband was one of those chosen to be a smuggler. Her eldest boy had done his full share of the shouting. Mrs. Eames was gratified at the interest with which she listened, but disappointed when she showed little or no surprise at what had happened.

While Mrs. Eames, having more or less exhausted her subject and herself, was drinking the tea which Gladys made for her, the "auntie" told a story of her own which helped to explain the amazing attitude of the villagers towards the pageant. Mrs. Eames was so much interested that she actually listened to what was said to her, a thing she very rarely

did.

According to the "auntie," the village people had been at first just as strongly opposed to the pageant as to any of the plays. But James Hinton had talked long to several of the leading men, to Jack Bunce, his fellow churchwarden, to the elder Whitty and others. No one knew exactly what he said, for the conversations were held in private in Hinton's own sitting-room at hours when the bar was not open to the public. The result, whatever was said, was surprising. One after another the leading men of the village declared themselves in favour of the pageant. They told their sons and daughters and other dependents to do exactly what Mrs. Eames bade them, exactly as they were bidden and promptly. If there was any disobedience the consequences would be serious and unpleasant.

"But," said the "auntie," "young men aren't what they were when I was a girl. Nor the girls aren't either." Here she scowled at Gladys. "And as likely as not the thing they're bidden to do is just what they won't do though they would have if they hadn't been bidden."

Fortunately there was another influence which could be and was brought to bear on the young men. James Hinton was admittedly the richest man in the village and wealth is power everywhere in the world. When he came to Hailey Compton and took over the inn from the executor of the previous owner, he had re-painted, re-decorated, and largely rebuilt the house. He had, moreover, paid cash without hesitation or grumbling for everything that was done. Never in living memory had so much money been spent in the village on building and furnishing. It therefore seemed possible, and indeed likely, that Hinton might spend more money and that made everyone anxious to be on good terms with him. He was also, from the point of view of the village men, a model landlord for their only inn. The beer and cider which he sold were good, of a much better quality than they had been before he came. He was willing to extend credit to those who, though thirsty, had no ready money. He seldom pressed for the payment of accounts, even when they were large and long overdue. He was willing to accept mortgages on cottages and gardens, even mortgages on future catches of fish, as satisfactory discharges of debts.

A man to whom half the community owes money, to whom the other half expects to owe money very soon, is in a strong position. If he chooses to support any cause there will be little opposition. When James Hinton, having persuaded the older men that the pageant was desirable, said the same thing without explanation to the young men and maidens, all real opposition vanished.

This was the "auntie's" account of what had happened. Mrs. Eames accepted it as an explanation of everything except James Hinton's attitude. That remained a mystery.

It was true, as the "auntie," a shrewd woman, suggested, that James Hinton might make a good deal of money out of the pageant, if it were a success.

"If there were a lot of people came to Hailey Compton in them there charabancs----"

"And there will be," said Mrs. Eames eagerly. "Hundreds of people will come. Thousands. And they'll all have to go to the Anchor Inn for lunch and tea. There's nowhere else they can go."

"And James Hinton can charge what he pleases," said the "auntie."

"I see that," said Mrs. Eames. "He'll make money out of it. That's it."

To anyone with Mrs. Eames's faith in the ultimate success of the pageant, the explanation should have been completely satisfying. James Hinton had promised what he would never be called upon to pay, with the certainty that his promise secured him the opportunity of earning large sums. To anyone less enthusiastic than Mrs. Eames, Hinton's guarantee would have looked like a desperate speculation. If the pageant cost a good deal, as it would, and then failed to attract a large audience, he would have to pay and would stand no chance of recouping himself. Even to Mrs. Eames this view of Hinton's action presented itself all the more clearly because she knew the man and was firmly convinced that he would never allow himself to be swayed by altruism. His guarantee, in spite of the explanation offered, remained a puzzle.

"It's time," said the "auntie," "for me to be getting home along."

She had drunk her share of the tea. She had heard all that Mrs. Eames had to say, thereby providing herself with a store of authentic gossip which would make her an important person in the village next day.

Mrs. Eames chased the unwilling Gladys to bed, having very little hope that the girl would be up in time to light the kitchen fire next morning. Girls, especially girls with Gladys's disposition, are exceedingly sleepy at six o'clock in the morning if they have sat up till nearly midnight the night before.

Then Mrs. Eames went to bed herself and slept soundly, untroubled by the problem of James Hinton's support of the

pageant. She had long learnt the folly of worrying over the "whys" of things, especially satisfactory things. James Hinton had done what she herself could never have done nearly so well. He had persuaded the whole village to take up the smuggling pageant with enthusiasm. That was a fact of the most agreeable kind. Why poke into the reasons of it? James Hinton had promised fifty pounds, and, an almost more astonishing thing, had induced the village people to promise one pound two and sixpence. These also were facts. With them, as a sensible woman, she was more than content. It would, indeed, have been nice to know just why James Hinton had offered his money and how he expected to make anything substantial out of the business. But the problem was not one which could keep Mrs. Eames awake.

Chapter VII

The next day was a busy one for Mrs. Eames.

It began with a demand from Gladys for a whole holiday. Her plea was that it was absolutely necessary for her to consult with her "auntie" on matters of grave family importance. She had spent a whole day the week before and two half-days in the course of a fortnight in the same way; and the "auntie" had been in the vicarage kitchen for several hours on all the other days. As an excuse for asking for another holiday the family consultation would not have impressed the simplest and most inexperienced mistress, and Mrs. Eames was no fool. She understood exactly what Gladys wanted her holiday for.

The whole village was seething with mild excitement over the meeting of the night before. Gossip of the most fascinating kind was flying from lip to ear at every cottage door. The most wild and improbable tales were being listened to with perfect belief. No girl would like to be shut up by herself in a kitchen while such joys were to be found outside. And Gladys, with her intimate knowledge of all that happened in the vicarage, would be welcome anywhere. She would be in a position to command the attention of thrilled audiences whatever she chose to say.

Mrs. Eames thoroughly understood this. Being a kind-hearted woman, full of sympathy with anyone who enjoyed excitement, she gave Gladys a holiday without a murmur.

This was not so difficult for her as it would have been for many mistresses. The vicar went off soon after breakfast with a package of sandwiches in his pocket. There was therefore no cooking to be done for him. Mrs. Eames never cooked for herself when left alone. She did not even lay a table for herself or go to the trouble of getting out plates, knives or forks. Her plan, a very sensible one, was to eat whatever she could find whenever she felt hungry, generally without even sitting down. When Gladys walked off in a white skirt and a pink silk jumper, Mrs. Eames had to make the beds and wash up the breakfast things. Otherwise the want of a servant left her with little or no extra work.

She was washing up cups and plates when she caught sight through the pantry window of James Hinton. Many vicars' wives, obliged to keep up the difficult pretence that they live as ladies, would have been embarrassed at being discovered in an apron, with sleeves rolled up, over a pantry sink, by a visitor like Hinton. But Mrs. Eames was entirely free from any taint of snobbishness. She would have gone on ironing clothes in front of her drawing-room fire if a duchess had called on her while so occupied. She greeted Hinton through the window and invited him to walk straight into the pantry.

Hinton's manners were as good as hers. Instead of expressing surprise or contempt, instead of offering any kind of excuse or apology for Mrs. Eames's occupation, he took his place beside the sink, picked up a glass-cloth and dried the vessels which Mrs. Eames handed to him. He did not even allow it to appear by a glance or a sniff that he found the cloth he used disgustingly dirty, though it was, being one of those of which Gladys had charge. It was not in vain that Hinton had lived as footman and valet in some of the best houses in England. He had acquired the manners of a great gentleman.

While they worked together, Hinton explained the objects of his visit. It was, in his opinion, desirable to secure as many influential patrons as possible for the pageant.

"Of course," said Mrs. Eames, "we've got to advertise, and there are only two ways of doing that. Either we've got to spend a lot of money, which we haven't got--though your guarantee was extremely generous. It quite took my breath away."

"A trifle, madam," said Hinton, drying a plate carefully, "a mere trifle."

"It wasn't a trifle at all," said Mrs. Eames, "but it won't run to a whole page advertisement in a daily paper. Luckily there's another way of advertising. My niece, Miss Appleby, told me about it. You know her, don't you?"

Hinton had never met Beth Appleby, but was quite prepared to listen to her views about advertising.

"The thing to do," said Mrs. Eames, brandishing a dripping cloth, "is to get names that advertise themselves."

Hinton took the fork from her gently and wiped it with Gladys's dirty cloth.

"Quite so, madam."

"If you get the proper names," said Mrs. Eames, "the newspapers will put in paragraphs about them without being paid. That's what my niece says."

"Having lived in many of the best houses in England," said Hinton, "I may say that I am aware of the advertisement value of our aristocracy."

"It's not only the aristocracy. Politicians are just as good. Actresses are probably better. Even authors--there are one or two authors----"

"I thought, madam," said Hinton, "that we might begin by securing the name of the bishop of the diocese."

Mrs. Eames sniffed. The bishop was a man of unblemished integrity, of kindly disposition, of respectable scholarship, but he did not strike her as having what Hinton described as "advertisement value." He had never denied the truth of any article in the Apostles' Creed. He did not preach in Methodist Chapels, or if he did made no public boast about it. He had never prosecuted any of his clergy for excessive devotion to catholicism. These are the only ways in which an ecclesiastic can attract public attention to himself, that is to say the only ways of acquiring "advertisement value."

"I don't see," said Mrs. Eames, "that the bishop would be much good to us."

Hinton bowed a submissive acquiescence in her opinion.

"I'm sure you know best, madam."

"My idea," said Mrs. Eames, "would be to start with Sir Evelyn Dent. He has promised to support us and I'm sure he'll have no objection to the use of his name as a patron. An ex-Cabinet Minister with a title! Don't forget the title, Hinton. And he has an honourable all of his own besides the knighthood."

"Sir Evelyn," said Hinton, "might perhaps secure the support of the present earl."

"Present earl? Oh, of course, his nephew, Lord Colavon. Yes. He would be quite good. An earl is an earl of course, but except for being an earl he's nothing particular, is he? I mean to say he's not well known."

"Not in political or literary circles, madam. The tastes of the present earl are understood to be sporting and dramatic."

"Dramatic!" Mrs. Eames became suddenly interested.

Hinton was drying the last saucer. Mrs. Eames, the task of washing up finished, was rubbing her dripping hands on her apron.

"Scarcely dramatic in the higher sense of the word," said Hinton. "The tastes of the present earl are rather in the direction of comic opera."

"He won't do us any harm, I suppose," said Mrs. Eames, "and I dare say Sir Evelyn will get him for us. Now who else would you suggest?"

"Did I mention the bishop, madam?"

"You did. And I said I didn't see what use the bishop would be. In fact he'd be worse than no use. If the public sees the name of a bishop at the head of a list of patrons it naturally thinks that the show is going to be a Diocesan Conference or something of the sort and simply stays away."

Again Hinton gave way, or appeared to give way.

"It might be advantageous, madam," he said, "if we secured the name of some gentleman prominently connected with the customs and excise."

Hinton's ideas of suitable patrons were certainly odd. A custom house officer, though a useful and generally an active civil servant, is not the sort of man whose name often appears in the newspapers.

"The name of a custom house officer on our list of patrons," Hinton explained, "would convince the public that our pageant is entirely *bona fide*."

"But what else could it be? You don't mean to suggest that we should really smuggle things?"

"Of course not, madam, but the public is sometimes very unintelligent, and----"

"No public could possibly be as stupid as that."

The cups and plates were by this time restored to their shelves in the pantry. Hinton, having discovered a leather, was

giving an unaccustomed polish to the spoons and forks.

"I only suggested a customs officer," he said, "because I thought that if he became interested he might arrange for some of his subordinates to take part in the pageant, as preventive officers, capturing the smugglers and the lugger. That's simply an idea. Of course the management of the dramatic side of the pageant is entirely in your hands."

"It's a jolly good idea. Real coastguards--but of course there aren't any now. Real preventive officers riding down the hill just in time to--- Or coming in a revenue cutter and firing on the lugger. I wonder if we could get them. Oh, do stop polishing those spoons, Hinton. It fidgets me to see you. Come into the vicar's study and talk over this idea of yours."

"Perhaps," said Hinton as they left the room, "there are some other household duties of which I could relieve you. I think you may safely trust me. I have had considerable experience in some of the best houses in England."

"If you like to help me to make the vicar's bed," said Mrs. Eames, "I don't mind."

"I shall be most happy," said Hinton, "but I beg of you, madam, to leave it entirely to me. If you will await me in the study----"

He held the door open for her and when he had shown her into the room went upstairs. But Mrs. Eames was not a lady who could sit still for very long, especially with an exciting idea in her mind. The thought of securing real customs officers thrilled her. After wandering about the room for some minutes she followed Hinton upstairs. She found him brushing an old and dilapidated pair of the vicar's trousers.

"Do you happen to know any customs officers?" she asked.

Hinton folded the trousers with careful exactness and put them in a drawer.

"Not personally, madam. But no doubt I can find out who the local head of that service is."

"Then do," said Mrs. Eames. "I'll leave that in your hands."

"And the bishop?" said Hinton. "Perhaps it would be better if you or the vicar were to approach the bishop."

Hinton was stropping the vicar's razor with vigour and skill.

"How you do nag on about the bishop!" said Mrs. Eames. "Please leave that razor alone. The vicar cuts himself often enough as it is and if you go making it too sharp he may give himself a dangerous gash. Why on earth are you so keen on the bishop? I've no objection to bishops of course, and if there's any real reason---- It's no use expecting him to read the funeral service over a smuggler shot by a coastguard. I quite see that would be most effective but no bishop would do it."

"The idea in my mind----" said Hinton, who was arranging the vicar's toothbrush and sponge neatly on the washing stand.

He went on to give his reasons for wishing to secure the bishop as a patron.

Bishops, so he explained, inspire great confidence in the public, which is always a little afraid of being let in for something improper or a little dubious.

"If we were concerned only with the aristocracy, madam, it would be a different matter. If I may say so, speaking after many years' experience of the upper classes, there would be no objection whatever to a hint, a suggestion of the risqué."

"But, good gracious, Hinton, we're not going to do anything in the least risqué as you call it."

"Certainly not, madam. Most assuredly not. But the public--the general public apart from the aristocracy and outside of literary and artistic circles--the public which we wish to attract, is very suspicious."

Mrs. Eames did not believe that any public could possibly suspect her pageant of being improper. But Hinton insisted that he was right and that their only security lay in having at least one bishop among their patrons.

"Very well," she said at last, "I'll leave the list of patrons entirely to you, Hinton. Get that sporting earl of yours if you can. Get a few of his musical comedy actresses too. Get a bishop and a couple of custom house officers. Get the local police if you like."

"Thank you, madam. Will you approach the bishop or shall I see the vicar about it?"

"You'd better do it yourself. As a churchwarden you've a perfect right to tackle a bishop. And anyway I'm sure the

vicar won't, though he ought to after the way you've folded his trousers for him and stropped his razor. All I ask is that if you have a committee meeting of your patrons----"

"There will not, I imagine, madam, be any necessity for that."

"Well, if there is," said Mrs. Eames, "you may take the chair at it yourself, for I won't."

Chapter VIII

Although Battersea is far from being a fashionable part of London there are pleasant little flats to be had there, overlooking the park, for those who are indifferent to the advantages of a smart address.

One of these is shared by Beth Appleby and her friend Mary Lambert. Beth Appleby makes an unsatisfying income by casual journalism, relying chiefly on the small but regular payments made by a syndicating agency for a weekly letter on London life. This is widely circulated in provincial papers. Miss Lambert dances fairly well and sings badly. She obtains engagements of uncertain duration in revues and musical comedies. There are times when she envies the steady weekly income paid to her friend by the syndicators. There are other times when Beth Appleby thinks that dancing is a better way of earning a living than writing. Pens may be mightier than swords, but legs are often more profitable than either.

The two girls were together in their flat one sunny morning at the end of May, just such a morning as makes young people long for pleasure and makes work of every kind extremely irksome, and, for most of us--though the thing seems self-contradictory--the want of work more irksome still.

Beth was at her writing-table, her pen in her hand, a sheet of paper in front of her. She had written the words "Lilith lisps" and then come to a dead stop. This was not surprising. Lilith had already lisped four times since breakfast. Beth lacked matter for a fifth and, like Rosalind's orator in a similar case, felt strongly inclined to spit.

Mary lay back in the most comfortable chair in the room with her feet on another. She had a cigarette between her fingers which she put to her lips occasionally but without much satisfaction. She was meditating disconsolately on the failure of the last show in which she had danced, a disaster which brought her face to face with the difficult task of getting another engagement.

"I wonder," said Beth irritably, "if there's anything in the world left for Lilith to lisp about."

"There's me," said Mary. "Lilith lisps that Miss Lambert, the charming young danseuse who has won the hearts of London playgoers, is thinking of accepting a tempting offer to go to New York."

"I'd do that and more for you, Mary, dear," said Beth, "if I thought it would be the slightest use. But it wouldn't. Lilith's delightful lisplings aren't read by anybody except the wives and daughters of greengrocers in Muddleborough and such places."

"A provincial engagement would be better than nothing."

"Besides," said Beth, "Lilith can't be always lisping about you. It's only a fortnight ago that I had you 'robed in a novel and daring creation' at a garden party given by Jimmy. He was rather stuffy about it afterwards. He said that if any of his aunts had seen the paragraph they'd have been down on him for not asking them to the party. I rather think he was afraid that if I wrote anything more of the kind he might be forced to give a garden party."

Jimmy--spoken of in this familiar way by both girls--is the Earl of Colavon, of whom James Hinton said that his tastes were sporting and dramatic.

"Let's invent another new frock," said Mary. "Next to having one, which I can't, the most amusing thing would be to imagine what it would be like if I could. I'll give you the details. All you have to do is to say that you saw me in it at a reception in Lambeth Palace, given by the Bishop of London."

"It's the Archbishop of Canterbury who lives at Lambeth."

"All the better. It sounds far grander for poor little me and less likely to be contradicted. An archbishop can't possibly know who wears what at his receptions. And, anyhow, he'll never read anything you write, Beth, darling."

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you if you like," said Beth. "I'll make Lilith lisp that you're one of the patrons of Aunt Agatha's pageant. She's got a bishop, so you really might be asked to a reception in a palace. And she's got Sir Evelyn Dent. What she wants now are a few literary and artistic stars to brighten things up a bit."

"I'll do that all right for her, if she'll give me a decent contract and pay for rehearsals."

"I don't fancy Aunt Agatha can pay anybody for anything."

"Well, I'm not going into it for the love of art; but if you can put my name down as a patron it might be some use. Almost any kind of ad. pays, and it isn't every day I get the chance of appearing in print alongside of a bishop and a Prime Minister. Sir Evelyn Dent is Jimmy's uncle, isn't he? And he used to be Prime Minister."

"Not quite," said Beth, "but as near as doesn't matter."

"What's the thing about? English history, I suppose. If it's Fair Rosamund we might work in a dance. I could do something graceful in a long skirt which wouldn't shock the bishop, holding the cup of poison in my hand. Your aunt could be Queen Eleanor if she liked. I'd do it for ten pounds and exes."

"Nothing doing in that way, I'm afraid," said Beth. "It's about smugglers."

"Well, there's that Nautch Girl dance of mine. It's not bad at all. And if your aunt can't pay I dare say Jimmy could screw a tenner out of that uncle of his. It would be quite worth it to the show. No feeling of stuffiness about that dance. I should think that pirates--you said pirates, didn't you?"

"Smugglers."

"Much the same thing. Smugglers or pirates are sure to be mixed up with nautch girls, whatever they are. Or at all events girls of some kind. I don't mind calling it a geisha dance if they like. I could borrow a kimono."

"Lilith lisps," said Beth, taking her pen again, "that among the patrons of the Hailey Compton Smuggling Pageant is Miss Mary Lambert, whose Nautch Girl dance has just delighted London. The wide appeal made by this pageant--the most magnificently staged show ever produced in England--will be understood when it is realised that among those interested, besides Miss Mary Lambert, are Sir Evelyn Dent, the Bishop of ...' remind me afterwards to find out what he's bishop of. 'And....' Now did Aunt Agatha mention anyone else? I can't remember. Anyhow, we'll put in Jimmy. He won't mind. 'The Earl of Colavon, whose name stands *facile princeps* among our sporting peers of the younger generation.' Thank heaven, there's another lisp. That makes five. If I'd three more I'd be through with the beastly things for this week, and I'd take you out on top of a bus to Kew or somewhere to get a breath of fresh air."

Fortune was kind to Beth Appleby. While she was still biting the end of her pen Lord Colavon came into the room. He brought with him an air of breezy cheerfulness, very like the weather outside, and a gaiety natural enough in one who was not compelled to write weekly "lispings" for his daily bread and ran no risk of losing his income through the failure of an apathetic public to appreciate a Nautch Girl dance.

"Jimmy," said Beth, "help me out."

"The precise thing I've come to do," said Jimmy. "New 8-cylinder Pallas Athene, sports model, guaranteed 70 miles an hour on the road, did over 100 at Brooklands, stands panting at the door. Dine at Oxford. Dine at York. Dine anywhere you like. Home by moonlight. Is there a moon? Must be a moon in May. 'The young May moon is beaming, love.' The poet wouldn't have said that if there wasn't a moon in May. Dashed particular about facts, poets have to be."

"Oh, Jimmy," said Mary. "Just wait one minute till we get on our hats. Come, Beth."

But Beth Appleby had a conscience, or that fairly satisfactory substitute for a conscience, a sense of prudence. Lilith's Lispings had to be posted that night, or there would be no cheque at the end of the week. And Lilith had only achieved six poor lisps.

"Can't be done," she said, "simply can't. Unless you can help me out with Lilith, Jimmy."

Lord Colavon's tastes were sporting and dramatic, but he was not altogether ignorant of our current literature. Thanks to an intimacy of some years with Beth Appleby, he knew all about Lilith's lisps and had often suggested valuable ideas. He did not fail now.

"What about the Pallas Athene?" he said. "Absolutely the latest thing. Triumph of British engineering. Revelation of speed possibility of road travel. See company's catalogue, free on application."

"Lilith lisps," Beth wrote rapidly, "that the *dernier cri* in motor luxury is the----' what did you call it, Jimmy?"

"Pallas Athene. Sports model."

Beth wrote down Pallas Athene and then went on:

"The upholstery is of delicately tinted Russia leather, equally suited to the light fabric of a summer frock and the rich glow of winter furs."

"Hold on," said Jimmy. "There's no use misleading the good old public. It's an 8-cylinder sports model, not a bus for

going out to dinner in at night."

"What I've got to do," said Beth, "is to write something that'll thrill my readers. Lilith doesn't get into motor garages, and isn't read by mechanics. She lisps in the chaste parlours of the ladies of the provincial middle classes. What they like to hear about is the upholstery. They don't care a rap about cylinders."

"Oh, well, say what you jolly well like about the car, but it will be awkward for me if one of my aunts, or good old Uncle Evie, who might almost as well be an aunt, went and bought the car expecting it to be the sort of gentle family pet which purrs when stroked."

"I suppose," said Beth, writing fast, "that you will have no objection to my saying that you were seen getting out of the car outside a club in St. James's?"

"None in the world," said Jimmy. "You can say any mortal thing you like about me, Beth, so long as you get through with that beastly writing of yours and come out for a spin."

"I've got you down already, along with Mary and Sir Evelyn and some bishop or other, as a patron of Aunt Agatha's pageant."

"I say, is that the thing Uncle Evie is so keen on? I'd a letter from him the other day, asking me if I knew of a lugger which could be hired by the week or bought cheap."

"Good," said Beth. "I'll make a paragraph about that. 'Apropos of the Hailey Compton Pageant, Lilith lisps that the harbours of England are being searched for a genuine eighteenth century lugger. Lord Colavon, who, besides being a keen motorist, is a distinguished yachtsman----'"

"But, I say, what's the old pageant about? That's what I want to know, and being a patron I think I've a right to ask."

"Smuggling," said Beth. "But for goodness' sake don't interrupt. If I'm to get these lispings done at all I simply must stick at it."

"I don't believe Uncle Evie is going to smuggle. He's not sportsman enough."

Mary Lambert, fully dressed for the motor run, slipped into the room in time to hear Jimmy's defence of his uncle's character.

"If he won't," she said, "I wish somebody else would. The price of silk stockings is scandalous, and unless something is done about it poor girls like me won't be able to live at all. It seems to me, Jimmy, that it's your plain duty to do a little smuggling in the interests of the profession. Other people may be able to get on without silk. We can't. It's a business necessity."

Jimmy sat silent for a minute or two, meditating on Mary's proposal. Then he suddenly addressed Beth.

"Nearly finished? For if you're not too breathless to listen I've got a scheme to propose."

"Give me one more lisp," said Beth, "and I'm yours for a thousand miles in the Russia leather Pallas Athene, all meals *en route* provided free."

"What I was just going to suggest," said Jimmy, "is that we should run down and dine with Uncle Evie, just to find out about this smuggling stunt of his."

"I should be terrified out of my life," said Mary. "I'm not accustomed to Cabinet Ministers, or for the matter of that to titled aristocrats, except you, Jimmy, and nobody would ever take you for an earl."

"You needn't be the least bit nervous," said Jimmy. "Uncle Evie is a bit boring at times, but he wouldn't frighten a ten-year-old orphan. We'll send him a wire to say we're coming."

"Jimmy," said Beth, "you're priceless! That's another lisp. Absolutely a topper. I had the good fortune to be present a few evenings ago at an informal little *al fresco* dinner given by Sir Evelyn Dent in his fascinating thirteenth century moated grange----"

"There's no moat," said Jimmy, "and it's a Manor House."

"What does that matter?" said Beth. "It's old, I suppose. People like your uncle always live in old houses."

"It's old, all right," said Jimmy.

"Then moated grange is the proper thing to call it when writing the Lispings of Lilith, but if you really prefer it I don't

mind calling it an historic pile. 'Sir Evelyn, a dignified and gracious----' What's the masculine of 'chatelaine,' Jimmy?"

"Chateau, I should think," said Jimmy, "but don't call poor old Uncle Evie that. He'd hate it."

"Sir Evelyn," said Beth, writing as she spoke, "'who between ourselves----' I mean to say '*entre nous* is something of a *grand seigneur*.'"

"I know I'll be petrified with terror," said Mary. "A *grand seigneur* in a moated grange."

"Among the guests," Beth went on, "was the Earl of Colavon, who was wearing the famous diamond studs which have been in the family since Henry VIII gave them to Anne Boleyn, who was, as everybody knows, one of the ancestors of the Dents,"

"Hang it all, Beth," said Jimmy, "I don't mind your making a fool of me in any ordinary way, but a fellow must draw the line somewhere. Why can't you say that Uncle Evie wore the diamond studs?"

"I'm putting him down for the Garter Ribbon," said Beth, "so you must have the diamond studs. Though I don't mind making them pearl if you'd rather. You simply must give the public what it wants if you go in for literature at all."

"Well, hurry up," said Jimmy. "It's all of 180 miles down to Uncle Evie's moated grange and I shall have to push the sports model along a bit if we're to get there for the *al fresco* dinner."

"Five minutes more and I've finished," said Beth. "'The conversation after dinner turned on---- Now what do you think, belovedest? Politics? Wrong. Science? Wrong. Guess again. Well, if you won't, let us whisper: silk stockings. But you'd have guessed that, wouldn't you? if I'd mentioned that Miss Mary Lambert was one of the party.'"

"I won't have it," said Mary. "As if I'd dare to talk about silk stockings to a *grand seigneur*. Tell her not to, Jimmy."

"Not much use my telling Beth anything. Besides, we are going to talk about silk stockings, aren't we? I mean to say, that's the general idea of the party--smuggling and so forth."

"Thank Heaven, I've finished," said Beth. "I'll just run and change my frock, and then we'll see what the Pallas Athene can do along the roads."

"If anybody talks about silk stockings," said Mary when Beth had left the room, "it'll have to be you, Jimmy. I simply daren't to a man like your uncle."

"But that's what we're going to see Uncle Evie about. What I mean to say is this: we want to get all the particulars about this smuggling stunt of his, whether there's any chance of fitting in a little of the real thing. It all depends, you know. But if we could manage to get in a few dozen pairs of silk stockings under cover of the pageant it'd be all to the good for you and Beth, wouldn't it?"

"Jimmy," said Mary, "you're an angel!"

"I don't promise anything. It all depends on how Uncle Evie's working the thing. If he leaves the lugger part of the show in my hands---- Didn't Beth say there was a bishop in it? You can do pretty nearly anything if you're holding hands with a bishop. Nobody ever suspects you. Besides, he might be a sportsman himself--the bishop, I mean. Some are, I'm told. Anyhow, I don't suppose he'd have any objection to a case of champagne. If he didn't care to drink it himself he could give it away to poor parsons in the diocese."

Chapter IX

For the first hundred and thirty miles or so of the journey the Pallas Athene did all that could be expected of an eight-cylinder sports model driven by a young man who did not shrink from paying an occasional fine. The needle of the speedometer often flickered past the sixty miles mark. The average speed fell little short of double that which our legislators--the same people who made the laws about beer--consider sufficient. Ilchester was reached in less than four hours. Jimmy, slowing down slightly through the long narrow street of the village, congratulated himself and his passengers on the achievement.

"I call that a satisfactory record so far," he said, "and we haven't killed or maimed so much as a dog, which just shows the advantage of careful driving."

He congratulated himself too soon. The inhabitants of Ilchester, indeed, escaped with their lives. Three main roads unite to run through their village, so they have learnt to be exceedingly alert and active. Lord Colavon had not so much as a broken collar-bone on his conscience when he pressed his foot on the accelerator at the end of the village. But a few miles along the road the engine began to give trouble. Jimmy was perfectly sure that he knew what was the matter with it. He spent ten minutes in oily work with a spanner. After that, things became rapidly worse. Noises of the most terrifying kind became frequent, and it was no longer possible to persuade the Pallas Athene to do more than thirty miles an hour on a level stretch of road.

Jimmy, less confident than he had been that he knew what was the matter, left his direct road and went to Taunton. There he sought help in a garage while the two girls had tea. The mechanic, an intelligent and competent man, shook his head over the Pallas Athene. He preferred a soberer and more reliable kind of car, even if it could not be driven very fast. In his opinion it would be folly to go on any farther, and he spoke vaguely of telegraphing to the makers of the car for some spare parts.

"Spare parts be damned," said Jimmy. "That means waiting here for the best part of a week."

The mechanic could not deny that the getting of spare parts is often a tedious business, especially--here he glanced with dislike at the Pallas Athene--"from the makers of cars like that."

"Can't you patch her up somehow," said Jimmy, "so that I can push on another forty or fifty miles? I haven't much more than that to do."

"I can patch her up," said the mechanic, "but there's no man living can tell how far she'll run afterwards."

Being a cautious man, experienced in the ways of motor-cars, he refused, even when pressed, to give any exact estimate of the distance which the patched Pallas Athene might run. The only thing he regarded as certain was that she would break down completely in the end.

"It might be two miles out of the town," he said, "or it might be a hundred."

"Do the best you can with her while I'm getting a cup of tea," said Jimmy. "Then fill up her tank and give her a pint of oil. I'll risk it."

The behaviour of the Pallas Athene after leaving Taunton was excellent. It may have been that the hour's rest in the garage revived her. More probably she was pleased by the attention she received from the mechanic. All women, even dignified Greek goddesses, like being fussed over and petted. Jimmy was moderate in his demands for speed and did not demand anything more than what he called "a funeral trot" of thirty-five miles an hour. Exeter was passed successfully, and the time came when the main road must be left for the last stage of the journey.

Jimmy, gaining confidence, ran at a fair speed up and down some abrupt hills on roads marked on the maps in inferior colours, occasionally not coloured at all. On a lonely open stretch of one of what the map makers describe as "other metalled roads, narrow," the breakdown, prophesied by the Taunton mechanic, came. Without so much as a warning shriek or a death rattle the Pallas Athene gasped and stopped.

Jimmy did all that a man could do. He lay on his back and screwed nuts. He lay on his side and screwed other nuts. He crawled on his stomach. He knelt, stooped, crouched, tapped and hammered. Like the good Samaritan, he poured in oil and would have poured in wine too if he had had any. Beth and Mary encouraged him and tried to help him. They spread a whole kit of tools out on a bank on the side of the road and very soon learned to distinguish between a

double-ended spanner, a box spanner and an adjustable spanner, often handed the right weapon to Jimmy without giving him a wrong one more than a couple of times first.

"Well I'm damned if I know what's wrong," said Jimmy, after an hour's experimental effort. "If only the wretched thing had held out another quarter of an hour we'd have been there, we can't be more than seven or eight miles from Morriton St. James, and Uncle Evie's house is just outside."

"Couldn't Mary and I walk on," said Beth, "and send somebody back for you? There must be a car in the village?"

"Morriton St. James is a town, not a village," said Jimmy, "and there are lots of cars, but it would take you the best part of three hours to get there--if you ever got there at all. Look at Mary's shoes, and your own are no better."

Mary exhibited, for admiration or contempt, a delicate suede shoe, certainly not intended for long walks over rough roads.

"I'd go myself," said Jimmy, "but I hate leaving you two alone in a place like this. I never saw such a road in my life. Not a blessed thing has passed, going either way since the Pallas Athene lay down and died."

"I'll do a lisp next week," said Beth, "on the dangerously congested condition of our country roads."

"I don't suppose anything ever does pass or ever will," said Jimmy.

He had been too optimistic at Ilchester over the performances of the Pallas Athene. He was too pessimistic now about the traffic on the road to Morriton St. James. A moving object appeared far off. The sound of clanging metal reached their ears. A very old Ford car came rattling towards them at a steady, but apparently laborious, twenty miles an hour. At the steering wheel sat James Hinton of the Anchor Inn in Hailey Compton.

Jimmy was determined not to be passed by. There are a few motorists as indifferent to the calls of charity as if they were priests or Levites, who go their way without succouring those in distress on the roadside. The driver of the Ford might be such a man. Jimmy made sure that he would at least stop by standing with outstretched hands in the middle of the road. The Pallas Athene, her wheels against one bank, occupied about one third of the road, which was not very wide. Jimmy, half-way to the other bank, made passing impossible without homicide. He need not have taken such extreme measures. James Hinton pulled up and inquired politely what was the matter and whether he could be of any use.

"If you'll take these two ladies into Morriton St. James," said Jimmy, "and send someone back to tow this car I shall be greatly obliged, and----"

He felt in his pocket for a coin, looking hard at James Hinton, to discover, if possible, whether he was the sort of man to whom a tip should be offered. James Hinton, since he pulled up, had been looking hard at Jimmy. In spite of the smears of oily dust which were on his face and his generally dishevelled appearance, he was recognisable.

"Certainly, my lord," he said. "It will be nothing but a pleasure to oblige your lordship in any possible way. Would it be convenient if I was to take the two ladies straight to the Manor House. It occurs to me that your lordship may intend to pay a visit to Sir Evelyn Dent, your lordship's uncle."

"I say," said Jimmy. "You seem to know all about me, and I'm delighted to meet you again and all that; but--damned stupid of me, of course--I can't for the life of me recollect who you are."

"Your lordship wouldn't recollect me," said Hinton. "It's not to be expected that you would; but I was in the late earl's service as first footman, and I had the honour of valetting your lordship sometimes lately when you stayed with Lord Dollman without bringing your own man."

"Got you now," said Jimmy. "You're the fellow Dolly thought such a lot of. Said he never knew anyone with such a talent for spotting winners. Anyhow, Dolly used to make pots while he had you."

"Very kind of his lordship to say so," said Hinton. "It's always been my wish to give satisfaction."

"I suppose you don't happen to be out of a job now. If you cared to come to me--- What about it?"

"Very kind of your lordship," said Hinton, "but I've retired from gentlemen's service. But of course if I could be of any use to your lordship----"

"You can and shall," said Jimmy. "You shall take these two ladies to the Manor House."

"Jimmy, dear," said Mary, catching his arm, "I daren't, simply daren't face your uncle without you. I don't believe Beth would either. He wouldn't know who we were."

"It would be a bit awkward," said Beth. "I don't suppose Sir Evelyn has so much as heard our names."

She was wrong about that. Sir Evelyn had heard her name very often since the idea of the smuggling pageant occurred to Mrs. Eames. He had even read, with gratification, every lisp of Lilith's in which his name had been mentioned since Beth began her campaign of advertising the pageant.

James Hinton, who had left his seat and was arranging the back part of his car for the reception of ladies, understood the situation, or thought he did. In fact he understood it too well, believing it to be rather more awkward than it actually was. It was perfectly plain to him that the two girls did not belong to the class which habitually visits the houses of our higher aristocracy. Since, in spite of that, they spoke to Lord Colavon as "Jimmy, dear," he assumed that they belonged to another class which could not be introduced to Jimmy's aunts, or even to his uncle without some explanation.

"If I might be allowed to make a suggestion, my lord," he said, "why not permit me to tow your car into Morriton St. James and then your lordship could accompany the ladies to the Manor House."

Jimmy looked at the derelict Pallas Athene. She was a long, low car, and her body sloped back in lines rather like the rake of the masts of a pirate schooner in a novel. Her delicate pale blue paint still shone, though covered with the dust of the long journey. Her aluminium bonnet glistened in the rays of the setting sun. Her great balloon tyres lay like coiled monsters under her wide black wings. He looked at Hinton's Ford, squat, dumpy, perched absurdly above her little wheels. He noted the battered mud guards, the chipped paint, the tattered hood strapped into an untidy bundle at the back. A pang of acute humiliation gripped him hard.

"Can you do it?" he asked with a sigh.

"On low gear," said Hinton. "There is no doubt that we can do it on low gear. Your lordship has not perhaps had much experience of Fords."

"None," said Jimmy bitterly.

"Then perhaps your lordship will excuse my saying that a Ford will do anything in low gear."

"If so," said Jimmy, with a burst of real magnanimity, "a Ford is a damned sight better car than a Pallas Athene eight cylinder sports model. It won't do anything on any gear."

A really good servant, accustomed to the best houses, is never found wanting, or unable to meet any demand made on him. Asked suddenly in the middle of the afternoon for tripe and onions he displays no astonishment; but in a short time brings tripe and onions into the drawing-room, in a nice dish on a silver salver. Told, at luncheon, that a complete outfit for water polo is required immediately afterwards for a party of eight, he produces, without fuss or protest, bathing suits, balloons and everything else required. James Hinton had been a thoroughly good servant, one of the very best in England, a country which produces the best servants in the world.

From the locker under the back seat of his car he took a long and reliable rope. It was as if he had fully expected to come upon a derelict Pallas Athene when he left home in the afternoon.

The two girls were packed into the back seat of the Ford with many polite apologies. James Hinton took his seat, rigidly upright in front. Jimmy, crushed with shame, crouched over the steering wheel of the Pallas Athene.

The drive began with a gallant effort of Hinton's to be better than his word. He tried the Ford on her top gear. She clanged, snorted, missed fire on one plug after another, made spasmodic jumps and finally stopped, her engine stalled. James Hinton got out, worked hard at the handle for a while and started again. This time he made no attempt to get out of low gear. The progress was slow. On the slightest incline it dropped to about four miles an hour. On a serious hill it became a crawl. Steam rose from the Ford's radiator like smoke from the funnel of a locomotive. The water inside could be heard boiling furiously. Oily smoke rose occasionally between the floor boards at Hinton's feet. The noise was terrific. The heat, even in the back part of the car where the two girls sat, was great. For Hinton it was blasting. But he stuck to his post and the car stuck to its work. She had emerged, a giddy young thing from the works in Detroit eleven years before. Time had sobered her, but had not broken that determination to get somewhere, somehow, which is the characteristic of all Fords of all ages.

The eight miles to Morriton St. James were accomplished in something a little over an hour. The procession stopped at the door of the principal garage in the town and a crowd quickly gathered round.

"That car," said Jimmy to the proprietor of the garage, "cost me twelve hundred pounds this morning. I'll swap it for one like James Hinton's if you happen to have such a thing in stock."

The garage owner refused to make the exchange. He was an honest man and would not take advantage of a stranger

whose nervous system was wrecked. Besides, it would have been very difficult to dispose of the Pallas Athene sports model at any price in Morriton St. James, a town inhabited by sober and cautious people.

Chapter X

James Hinton stood respectfully aside while Jimmy made his offer to the proprietor of the garage. When he got his chance to speak, his voice, like that of every good servant, was emotionless and soothing.

"Excuse my asking you the question, my lord, but will the ladies be spending the night at the Manor House?"

"They didn't intend to," said Jimmy. "Nor did I. But we'll all have to now, unless you feel inclined to run us up to town after dinner in your Ford."

Hinton smiled an entirely respectful appreciation of this pleasantry.

"I merely asked the question, my lord," he said, "because I thought it might be well to make arrangements for bringing up the luggage."

It was perfectly apparent that there was no luggage to bring. The Pallas Athene was not even fitted with a luggage grid and there were no bags or suit cases in the car. But Hinton would have considered it a breach of good manners to appear to think that two ladies, companions of Lord Colavon and guests of Sir Evelyn Dent, could possibly be travelling without luggage.

"Great Scott!" said Jimmy, "I never thought of that. Of course they haven't got a blessed thing for the night. Nor have I. It doesn't matter about me. Uncle Evie can lend me a razor and a comb. But--I say, Hinton, you know all about these things. Do you think Uncle Evie's housemaid could lend the ladies what they want?"

"I've no doubt that the female members of the Manor House staff," said Hinton, "will be able to supply all that is absolutely necessary. But that is a course which I would hardly recommend. The garments usually worn by young persons of that class, my lord, are not what the ladies are accustomed to."

"Housemaids don't run to silk nighties, Hinton?"

"I fear not, my lord."

"Then what on earth had we better do? The shops in this place are sure to be shut by this time."

"If your lordship is willing to leave the matter in my hands---- As it happens Mr. Linker, the principal ladies' outfitter in Morriton St. James, is a friend of mine. I intended, if your lordship will pardon my mentioning my own affairs--I intended paying him a visit this evening. A little matter of business, my lord. Indeed that was the original purpose of my visit to Morriton St. James. I feel quite certain that Mr. Linker will be ready to let the ladies have what they require."

"I suppose that you and Linker between you will know what they do require."

"I venture to hope so, my lord, and I may add, that although Mr. Linker's establishment is not quite on a level with the best of the London houses, he stocks some very high-class goods. I feel convinced that if the matter is left in our hands the young ladies will have no reason to complain."

"All right," said Jimmy, "and if your friend Linker happens to have a suit of pyjamas that will fit me, and a clean collar, and a brush and comb----. But I expect it's too much to expect him to have brushes and combs."

"I think, my lord, that through Mr. Linker's influence in the town all your lordship requires will be obtainable. May I ask"--Hinton took out a slip of paper to make a note of the important answer to this question, "which shaving soap your lordship prefers and which tooth powder?"

"Hinton," said Jimmy, "you're invaluable. Dolly regarded you as a jewel, but he little knew what you could do. Spotting winners is nothing to providing three complete trousseaux at an hour's notice in a small country town. I don't believe there's another man in England could do it." He took out his pocket-book. "Will a ten pound note cover the damage? If so, keep the change. You deserve it and more."

"Mr. Linker will no doubt furnish his account in due course, my lord," said Hinton.

He pocketed the note as he spoke. It is by such actions that men become rich enough to buy country inns, refurnish them, and give fifty pound guarantees to pageants.

Jimmy took his seat beside Hinton in the front of the Ford. The car was now able to run on high gear, but even so the noise of their progress was considerable. Quite enough to render it safe for the passengers in front to talk without any risk of being overheard by those behind.

Jimmy took advantage of his opportunity.

"I say, Hinton, you know Uncle Evie pretty well, don't you?"

"I had the honour of valetting him more than once when I was first footman in the service of your lordship's father, the late earl."

"Then you must know all there is to know about his little tempers and fads and so forth. Just tell me this, speaking quite confidentially--how do you think he'll take it when I tell him that I and the two ladies have come to stay? He's expecting us to dinner but not for the night. Now what about it, Hinton? Will there be any unpleasantness? To be quite candid, I expect we'll be there for the best part of a week. It will take all that to get whatever spare parts are wanted for the Pallas Athene."

"I don't happen to know exactly how Sir Evelyn Dent is situated at the moment, my lord, but if there is any difficulty with the domestic staff I shall be only too pleased to offer my services."

"That's kind of you, Hinton, but it's not exactly what I meant. I was thinking more----"

"Quite so, my lord," said Hinton, interrupting him, but very respectfully. "You're thinking of the young ladies. So far as waiting at table is concerned I am quite prepared to relieve the staff of any extra work. But what your lordship has in mind is the maiding of the young ladies. That, I fear, I am not competent to undertake. But I happen to be aware that the head of the dressmaking department in Mr. Linker's establishment was formerly ladies' maid in some quite good houses. I have no doubt that in order to oblige she would be willing to look after the young ladies during their stay."

"Secure her, Hinton, if you think it will make matters any easier with the Manor House staff. But it wasn't so much the servants that I was thinking about. How will Uncle Evie himself take it? That's the real question."

"I've never known Sir Evelyn behave otherwise than as a perfect gentleman, my lord."

"That's all right as far as it goes, and it's nice to know that he won't throw stones at them. But a gentleman, even a perfect gentleman, can make things damned uncomfortable for other people when he chooses. Now, will he? That's the point."

"That, my lord," said Hinton, "will depend a good deal on the young ladies themselves. I've always understood that Sir Evelyn, when a young man, was very fond of the society of ladies, agreeable ladies, if you understand me, my lord."

Hinton's way of saying "agreeable ladies" left no doubt in Jimmy's mind what kind of ladies he meant. He turned on him rather angrily.

"Don't get it into your head, Hinton, that I'm travelling about the country with women of that sort, or that I'd try to foist them on Uncle Evie if I was."

"I beg pardon, my lord," said Hinton in a tone of great humility. "Nothing was further from my mind than to suggest anything of that sort. When I said agreeable I meant nothing more than sprightly, if I may use the word."

He had meant a great deal more; but Jimmy accepted the denial.

"Any breach of decorum would, I feel sure, be most objectionable to Sir Evelyn Dent. But I'm quite sure that there's not the slightest reason to anticipate such a thing."

Jimmy was a quicktempered but easily-pacified young man. The idea of Beth Appleby and Mary Lambert earning their board and lodging by sprightliness tempered with decorum amused him. He turned round in his seat and addressed the two girls.

"Just listen to this," he said. "We've got to cadge on Uncle Evie for beds to-night. Must sleep somewhere, you know, and there isn't anywhere else. Hinton, who knows all about everything, says that if you two behave properly Uncle Evie will be quite kind, so what you've got to be is---- What was the word you used, Hinton? I know it was a good one."

"Sprightly, my lord," said Hinton, "but I'm not sure whether it would be advisable to repeat it to the young ladies."

"What you've got to be," said Jimmy, turning to the girls again, "is sprightly."

"I'm there all the time in sprightliness," said Beth. "That's how I earn my daily bread. If Lilith didn't lisp with unfailing sprightliness I'd lose my job."

"But at the same time," said Jimmy, "there mustn't be the slightest breach of decorum. Hinton says Uncle Evie is a perfect dragon on decorum."

"That's where you'll have to be careful, Mary, my dear," said Beth.

"Me!" said Mary. "I shall be a petrified icicle with sheer terror. But, I say, Jimmy does that mean no cigarettes?"

"What do you say about that, Hinton?" said Jimmy. "Is Uncle Evie down on women smoking?"

"Many ladies of good position smoke nowadays, my lord," said Hinton. "I should imagine that Sir Evelyn Dent is quite accustomed to it!"

"One cigarette after each meal, Mary," said Jimmy. "Certainly not more."

The warnings turned out to be unnecessary. Sir Evelyn received the girls with dignified, though slightly pompous, kindness. When he heard of the failure of the Pallas Athene he at once offered to put up the whole party for the night.

"My head housemaid seems to be a very competent young woman," he said to Beth; "if you'll be so good as to tell her what you want. This is a bachelor household, I'm afraid, but the head housemaid is really very resourceful. You may not be quite as comfortable as if you'd brought your own luggage----"

"Oh, that's all right," said Jimmy. "Hinton happens to know a man who supplies outfits complete from the cradle to the coffin at ten minutes' notice. A capital fellow. Baby clothes and shrouds are all the same to him and of course anything in between."

"How thrilling!" said Beth. "Do you mean to say that you were arranging all that while we thought you were swapping your motor for a Ford? But do you think Hinton will remember everything? I'd like a toothbrush, I must say."

"Hinton," said Jimmy, "is to be relied on absolutely."

"Hinton?" said Sir Evelyn. "Is that the man who keeps an inn in a village called Hailey Compton? If so, I know him, and I really think, Miss Appleby, that you may rely on him. He has a knack of getting exactly what he wants. I've seen a good deal of him during the last fortnight. He keeps coming here about a pageant they're getting up. I wonder what he's doing in Morriton St. James this evening. Surely he can't be coming to see me again?"

Sir Evelyn had in fact received seven or eight visits from Hinton, who often brought Mrs. Eames with him and never came without a request of some kind. Sir Evelyn, persuaded by Hinton and talked down by Mrs. Eames, had already asked some of the most eminent people in the kingdom to be patrons of the pageant. He had written several articles on English smuggling with special allusions to the pageant--and persuaded the editors of some of our leading daily papers to publish them. He dreaded being asked to do anything more, and the news that Hinton was in Morriton St. James made him uneasy. Jimmy reassured him.

"He's not after you this time, Uncle Evie. He's come to see the local underclothes man on a matter of business. He told me so himself. I didn't ask what the business was, but I should say it had something to do with backing horses. Dolly--that's Lord Dollman, you know--always said that Hinton was A1 for spotting winners. If it wasn't that it was making money some other way. Hinton's always there when it comes to gathering in the cash."

"He got five shillings out of me for a glass of beer the other day," said Sir Evelyn.

"That's nothing," said Jimmy. "He had a tenner from me over this outfitting business."

"Good gracious, Jimmy!" said Beth. "You don't mean to say you spent ten pounds on nighties for me and Mary?"

"I meant to," said Jimmy, "but I didn't. Hinton collared the money and the other fellow's to send in a bill afterwards."

Thus, thanks mainly to the sprightliness of Lord Colavon, pleasant relations were established at once, and Sir Evelyn began to enjoy the society of his guests. He became actually cordial during dinner when he discovered that Beth was the author of Lilith's weekly Lispings.

"I am entertaining angels unawares. I have to thank you, my dear young lady, for the pleasure your delightful causerie has given me since I first began to read it."

In this Sir Evelyn was perfectly sincere. Beth, at the instigation of Mrs. Eames, had written a number of very nice paragraphs about him. Since his retirement from public life, after the fall of the Government, his name had dropped out

of the newspapers. He missed, more than he would have cared to confess, the daily bundle of press cuttings which used to come to him from an industrious agent in London. Beth's flattering Lispings were "good news from a far country," which, as Solomon says with all his usual wisdom, is like "cold water to a thirsty soul."

"And how is your aunt?" said Sir Evelyn. "But I dare say I can give you the latest news of her. She lunched with me three days ago. We were discussing the details of her very interesting scheme for a local pageant. Her idea--it is entirely hers. I do no more than help her with such crumbs of historical knowledge as I possess. Her idea--but I'm sure you've heard about it."

"Oh, rather," said Beth. "I've heard of nothing else for weeks. Almost daily letters from Aunt Agatha. I'm working hard at the publicity side of the affair. Mary has just agreed to be a patron as representative of the dramatic world."

"Miss Lambert's name," said Sir Evelyn with a courteous bow, "will go far to secure success."

"I'm in it too," said Jimmy. "Beth roped me in as a patron this morning."

"Jimmy represents the world of sport," said Beth.

"I'm delighted to hear," said Sir Evelyn, "that Jimmy is going to do something useful at last. Your good influence, no doubt, Miss Appleby."

"Hang it all, Uncle Evie!" said Jimmy. "I'm not such a rotter as all that. Look at the way I've been supporting home industry, knocking out unemployment and all that sort of rot by buying cars like the Pallas Athene. Very few fellows would do it."

"You may perhaps be able to help us," said Sir Evelyn, "in the matter of securing a suitable lugger. The luggers used in the contraband trade during the latter part of the eighteenth century were of the type known as *chasse-maree*, designed originally in France. But I fear that these details will not interest you young ladies."

"They thrill us," said Beth. "Don't they Mary?"

"Of course," said Mary.

She had been stifling yawns with difficulty for some time past and feared that a talk about eighteenth century French boats was not likely to keep her awake. She just managed to say her "of course" in tones of conviction.

Sir Evelyn suggested that the party should go to his study, where he could exhibit pictures of *chasse-marees*, some of them actually engaged in smuggling. He had also--Mary struggled desperately against overwhelming sleepiness--books with diagrams, showing the lines on which the boats were built.

A couple of hours later, when Beth and Mary had gone to bed, Sir Evelyn had a conversation with his nephew on a very different subject.

The Earl of Colavon ought to marry. This, in the opinion of the family, was a matter of duty, and the family had no hesitation about speaking its mind. Sir Evelyn and four aunts all spoke their minds plainly and often. Jimmy was becoming heartily sick of the subject. Sir Evelyn talked about "the family," which for the good of society, of England, even of mankind in general, ought not to be allowed to die out. That was not how he put it, but it was exactly what he meant. The aunts went further. After expressing opinions about the value of "the family" very like those of Sir Evelyn, they used to produce suitable ladies, no doubt with the kindly intention of saving their nephew the trouble of looking out for a wife for himself. The ladies were not marshalled in a bevy but thrust on Jimmy's attention one by one, a second taking the place of the first when it became clear that the first was not approved, a third succeeding the second and so on, until the supply of suitable ladies was exhausted. This was not so long a business as might have been expected. There are never at one time very many ladies suitable for the position of Countess--at least, not very many suitable in the opinion of the aunts of the Earl of Colavon.

When there were no more suitable ladies the aunts fell back on a hope that Jimmy would marry someone not entirely unsuitable. They could not produce anyone of this kind because they only associated with people whose daughters were suitable. But they continued to press this view of his duty on their nephew. So did Sir Evelyn. He displayed a great broad-mindedness, going so far as to say that he would be quite ready to welcome even an actress as a niece--an actress of good character and suitable age. The aunts would not, perhaps, have been quite so liberal.

The arrival of Beth Appleby and Mary Lambert in Jimmy's company cheered Sir Evelyn. The girls, if not precisely "suitable" in the full sense of the word, had nice manners, pleasant tempers and good looks. They were plainly on very intimate terms with Lord Colavon, addressing him as Jimmy. Sir Evelyn felt hopeful; but he was puzzled and a little annoyed by the fact that there were two girls and that he was unable to discover that one was preferred to the other.

For some time he skirted round the subject and Jimmy, who guessed what was coming, skilfully slipped away from it. At last Sir Evelyn was reduced to the crude bluntness of approach which all his political training taught him to dislike.

"I can't help wondering----" he said, "I'm sure, my dear boy, that you'll excuse my speaking plainly. I have been wondering all the evening whether you find yourself seriously attracted by either of the charming young ladies who came here with you to-day?"

Jimmy, cornered at last, replied with equal plainness:

"I'm seriously attracted," he said, "by both of them."

"I take it," said Sir Evelyn, "that the idea of marriage with one of them has been present to your mind."

"Never absent from it, Uncle Evie."

"My dear boy, I'm delighted to hear it. Delighted. Now which is it?"

"That," said Jimmy, "is precisely my difficulty. If there was only Mary Lambert and Beth Appleby did not exist, it would be perfectly simple. I'd do my best to marry her; though mind this, Uncle Evie, she might not be willing to marry me. On the other hand, if there was no such person as Mary Lambert I'd make a pretty hard push at marrying Beth Appleby. I'd call myself a jolly lucky fellow to get her, or Mary. That's the situation, and I think you'll agree with me that it's an uncommonly difficult one. I don't see any way out, do you?"

"That," said Sir Evelyn, "is an absurd, even an immoral, way to talk, and I should be seriously angry with you if I thought you meant it. You must be able to make up your mind which of the two you prefer."

"But that's just it," said Jimmy. "I can't. My only hope is that some other fellow will come along and marry one of them. That's what I'm waiting for, and it's bound to happen sooner or later, I should think. Then I'll be all there. If the other fellow marries Beth, I'll have a try at Mary next day. If, on the other hand, he marries Mary----"

"This incurable habit of flippancy," said Sir Evelyn irritably, "appears to be growing on you."

"My dear Uncle Evie, I'm as serious as a judge with a black cap on, and if you like I'll prove that I mean what I say. Suppose you chip in and marry one of them--she might have you if you asked her nicely--I'll give you my word of honour to do my best to marry the other. I call that a fair offer, and you can count on there being no ill feeling afterwards, whichever you take. I shall be perfectly content with the other, always supposing that she will marry me. If she won't, then my part of the business is off. Now what about it?"

Sir Evelyn held out his hand with a gesture of dignified sorrow.

"I think perhaps I'd better say good night to you. There is nothing to be gained by further discussion along these lines."

"Sorry, Uncle Evie, I apologise, grovel, and all that. But hang it all, you know, you ought to be fair. You're everlastingly ragging me about not marrying, and I put up with it like a lamb. But the very minute I so much as hint that you might do it yourself---- After all, you're just as unmarried as I am and have been for double as long; which makes it far worse. You must be able to see that."

In this way Jimmy concealed from an inquisitive uncle the fact that for some months he had been trying to persuade Beth Appleby to marry him and that she had been steadily but quite good-humouredly refusing to do so.

Chapter XI

Jimmy growled a sleepy "Come in" in reply to a tap at his bedroom door. Having thus accomplished all that could be expected of him for some time he relapsed into deep slumber again. There was nothing to disturb him in the familiar performance of the servant who called him. A tea tray was laid down noiselessly on the table beside his bed. Curtains were drawn back as nearly noiselessly as curtains could be drawn. There was the usual folding of shirts and socks, laying out of shoes, arrangement of other clothes in due order, the depositing in appropriate places of collar, tie and handkerchief. The same things were done for Jimmy every morning of his life and had been done for him in much the same way ever since he had left school. There was nothing to disturb him and he was too sleepy to realise that he was in a strange room.

"Your lordship's bath," said the servant, "will be prepared. I shall return and tell your lordship when it is ready. In about ten minutes if that is convenient to your lordship."

The voice was unfamiliar. Jimmy opened his eyes sufficiently to recognise that the servant who was leaving the room was not his own man. He saw at the same time that he was in an unfamiliar room. The recollection of the adventures of the day before came to him and he knew that he had slept in his uncle's house. He poured out his tea and as he drank it composed a biting and insulting telegram to be sent, regardless of expense, to the makers of the Pallas Athene sports model car. He lit a cigarette to stimulate the workings of his brain.

The servant came into the room again, as he promised, in ten minutes. Jimmy recognised Hinton.

"Hallo!" he said. "How do you come to be here?"

"Your lordship will recollect that I ventured to suggest last night that it might be convenient if I were to wait upon your lordship."

"Of course. Yes. Now you mention it, I remember. You said you'd come in to help Uncle Evie's butler in case the poor fellow felt overworked. Uncommonly kind of you to do it, Hinton, and I'm sure we're all greatly obliged to you. You were to have got tooth-brushes and things for the two young ladies. I hope you did."

"I left that matter in Mr. Linker's hands, my lord, with every confidence that satisfaction would be given. Mr. Linker's establishment is not actually first class. That could hardly be expected in Morriton St. James, but I think everything required will be provided. The young person of whom I spoke to you last night----"

He went on to say at some length, that the head of the dressmaking department in Mr. Linker's shop had consented to return, temporarily, to her original trade, and was at that moment acting as lady's maid to Beth and Mary. Jimmy suspected that neither of the girls was accustomed to such ministrations, but had no doubt they would enjoy them. Mr. Linker, it appeared, had been quite willing to give his dressmaker a holiday; such was his respect for Sir Evelyn and his desire to be obliging. Hinton said nothing about the feelings of Mr. Linker's customers, the young ladies of Morriton St. James, several of whom were waiting impatiently, even clamorously, for new dresses.

"It's uncommonly civil of your friend Linker," said Jimmy. "You might thank him from me, will you?"

"I have reason to believe, my lord, that Mr. Linker proposes to call on you himself this morning."

"With the bill for the night dresses and things, I suppose?"

Hinton was profoundly shocked by the suggestion.

"Certainly not, my lord. Mr. Linker understands your lordship's position in society too well to send in an account in anything less than three months. I should certainly not have recommended Mr. Linker to your lordship's notice if there had been the least risk of his being guilty of such an act of indecorum. The fact is, my lord"--here Hinton's tone became confidential--"Mr. Linker wishes to ask a favour, and I may add that if your lordship sees your way to consider Mr. Linker's proposal favourably, I shall regard it as a favour to myself."

"What does he want, Hinton? If I can do anything in the way of recommending him to Uncle Evie---- Contract for the supply of caps and aprons for the housemaids here, or anything of that sort, I shall be delighted. A man who can provide trousseaux complete with lady's maid at ten minutes' notice after the shops are shut deserves any recommendation I can give."

"I gather, my lord, that Mr. Linker's request is not connected with the ladies' outfitting business."

"If he wants to buy what's left of the Pallas Athene," said Jimmy, "he can have it cheap."

Hinton allowed himself a respectful smile.

"I gathered from what Mr. Linker said to me that he wishes to see your lordship with reference to the coming pageant at Hailey Compton."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Now how the devil does a shopkeeper in Morriton St. James come to be mixed up in a pageant at Hailey Compton? What business is it of his?"

Hinton produced a long, plausible and quite unconvincing explanation of Linker's interest in the pageant. He was, it appears, an active politician, a supporter of the party to which Sir Evelyn belonged. He took the chair at political meetings. He was president of a club by means of which it was hoped that working men might be attached to the party. He was very anxious to secure Sir Evelyn's return at the next election.

"I know that kind of fellow," said Jimmy. "Invaluable, of course, but boring. I quite see that Uncle Evie has to put up with him. 'How to be civil though yawning. A Tract for Parliamentary Candidates.' But I'm not in that line myself and I don't see why I should be worried by your friend Linker. And anyhow, what has all that got to do with the pageant?"

Hinton's explanation went on. Mr. Linker had conceived the idea that the position of the party in the constituency would be improved if the pageant, with which Sir Evelyn was intimately connected, were a real success.

"I don't see that in the least," said Jimmy. "As a matter of fact, there are two or three other things about that pageant that I don't quite see. But I'm always stupid till I have had my bath. Can't understand how any fellow is expected to be at his brightest and best till he's wallowed about in cold water a bit. Suppose you drop in here while I'm dressing, Hinton, and we'll have a chat."

"I shall be quite at your lordship's service at any time," said Hinton.

Jimmy returned from his bath thoroughly awake and as fit as he ever would be to deal with the puzzling problem of Linker's interest in the pageant. He had indeed, while drying himself, hit on a new question to which he wanted to find an answer. Why was Hinton himself so eager about the pageant? Sir Evelyn had mentioned the guarantee fund and Hinton's fifty pound promise. There must, Jimmy supposed, be some reason for such generosity. He wanted to find out what it was.

"Now, Hinton," he said, "just tell me all over again why your friend Linker thinks that this pageant will win the election for Uncle Evie."

Hinton was apparently not pleased with this inquiry. His reply was a perfectly courteous and respectful rebuke of Lord Colavon's curiosity.

"That, my lord, is a point on which I am unable to give you any information. But Mr. Linker is very experienced in elections and thoroughly understands the sort of appeal which impresses the voter. I think perhaps we may safely leave the matter in his hands."

Jimmy rubbed shaving soap on his face thoughtfully for a minute. Then he asked Hinton another question.

"I understand that you're in this pageant up to your neck, Hinton. Now why?"

Hinton glanced sharply at Lord Colavon's face reflected in the mirror. It was covered with a foam of white soap and no face in that state looks intelligent. Hinton decided that nothing more than an evasive answer was necessary.

"I am certainly interested, my lord."

Jimmy laid down his shaving brush and took up his razor. After giving his chin a scrape he turned to Hinton again.

"As an historical archaeologist," he said, "you are, of course, interested in any effort to re-create the past."

Hinton was a little puzzled. His safest plan seemed to be to say nothing.

"And the artistic side of the thing appeals to you strongly," said Jimmy.

Hinton, still puzzled, and becoming uneasy, bowed gravely.

"Remarkable man you are, Hinton," said Jimmy. "And your friend Linker, the shopkeeper, is a remarkable man, too. Suppose now you tell me all about this pageant, just who else is in it besides you and Uncle Evie and what's going on

and how far you've got."

Hinton was perfectly willing to tell a good deal, if not actually all there was to tell, about the pageant.

He gave a list of the patrons so far. He described Mrs. Eames at some length. He described the vicar, who continued to live a secluded life, chiefly in the church, taking no part in the village activities. He described the rehearsals, held daily at high tide. Bales of goods and small casks, lent by Hinton himself, were landed at every high tide out of one of Bunce's boats. Songs, which Mrs. Eames called chanties, were sung as the work went on. Sometimes the cargo, when landed, was stored in the cave. Sometimes it was carried across the beach, with the accompaniment of other chanties, and loaded on the back of the only horse which Mrs. Eames had been able to borrow. Unfortunately, the first enthusiasm of the village was dying away. The daily rehearsals were felt to be tiresome. It required all the influence of Hinton himself, Bunce and some of the older men, to keep the people at work.

Costumes, designed by Sir Evelyn, were being made in Morriton St. James under the supervision of Mr. Linker, who had undertaken that part of the work.

"Sees his way to making a bit, I suppose," said Jimmy acutely. "I thought there must be money in it for him somewhere."

"No doubt, my lord, there will be the usual profit on the sale of the costumes."

"But not much," said Jimmy, "hardly enough to make it worth his while to plunge into the thing and go pursuing people like me and Uncle Evie. And where do you come in, Hinton? I mean to say, apart from your interest in English history and village art, what made you guarantee fifty pounds?"

James Hinton smiled but gave no answer to this question. He offered instead a description of a picture of a smuggling lugger which hung in the tap-room of the Anchor Inn, ready to be inspected by anyone interested in the pageant. It had been painted by a young man, a nephew of Mr. Linker's, who had won several prizes for art given by the County Education Committee. The details of the hull and rigging had been worked out under the direction of Sir Evelyn. The sea which surrounded the lugger, the work of the young man himself, was highly spirited and very blue.

Jimmy listened to all this without comment. The picture of the lugger did not interest him. He had finished shaving and was washing his face. Hinton went on to explain at some length why he and Linker were anxious to secure Lord Colavon's support for the pageant. They had got a bishop, a couple of leading politicians, a judge and a doctor with a title. They now wanted to reach another section of the public, sporting people and theatrical people. They hoped that Lord Colavon, if he supported the pageant, would interest his friends in it.

"I see," said Jimmy, drying his face. "But what I want to know is, what do I get out of it? Uncle Evie wins an election. Your friend Linker scoops in a profit for costumes. You gratify your passion for archaeology. But where do I come in?"

"I was in hopes," said Hinton, rather feebly, "that your lordship might find it amusing. Mrs. Eames is a very remarkable lady. I feel convinced that you will enjoy meeting Mrs. Eames."

"Hardly good enough, Hinton. I'm sure Mrs. Eames is all you say. But I have some respect for the Church, even if you haven't, and I never flirt with parsons' wives."

Having finished washing he began to dress. Hinton offered him all kinds of unnecessary assistance and for a while nothing more was said. At last, fully clothed, except for his coat and waistcoat, Jimmy sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Now, Hinton," he said, "you've told me a lot about this pageant, and it's only fair that I should tell you something. Sit down and listen to me for a minute. Smoke if you like."

Hinton preferred to stand--or said he did--and refused the offer of a cigarette. Jimmy began:

"My idea of the day of your pageant is something like this. Crowds on the shore. Village people dressed up as assistant smugglers waiting for the arrival of the lugger. Everybody anxiously peering out to sea. Distinguished visitors in the reserved seats scanning the horizon with telescopes. Uncle Evie with a telescope. The bishop with binoculars. Other eminent men with field glasses. Women asking stupid questions in order to keep conversation going. Everybody jumping with excitement and expectation till the lugger comes in sight. Then cheers. Loud cheers. That's about the programme so far, isn't it, Hinton?"

"That, my lord, is very much what we hope to accomplish."

"Exactly. But before your lugger comes in sight she must have been somewhere out of sight. That's only common sense. You follow me so far."

"Certainly, my lord, out of sight. Certainly."

"Very well. Where was she before she came into sight? Tell me that?"

"I'm not quite sure that I catch your lordship's meaning."

"I'll try and make it plainer for you if you like. The lugger was out of sight at one time. Very well. A little later she comes into sight. I know there's a school of philosophers which says that a thing simply doesn't exist unless somebody's looking at it. And of course if that's true there's no use asking questions about where the lugger was before the bishop and Uncle Evie saw it through their glasses. It just wasn't anywhere. In fact there wasn't a lugger. But you and I don't believe that, do we? We can't, you know, because we both intend to be on board that lugger, and we'd hate to pass out of existence till Uncle Evie and the bishop chose to see us. We may take it then, that the lugger was somewhere before she came in sight. But where? That's what I want to get at."

"I don't think that point's been considered, my lord."

"Well, it ought to be and I'm going to consider it now. The lugger might have been at St. Malo, or Granville, or Cherbourg, or any port along that bit of coast. Or she might have been in St. Helier, or Peter's Port, or some little bay in one of the Channel Islands. And if she was--mind I'm only saying if--I suppose you might make a nice little sum over a few dozen cases of French brandy that didn't pay duty. And your friend Linker could do with a consignment of French silk, duty free. I could manage along with a case or two of champagne and a few silk stockings for these young ladies. You see how the thing works out, Hinton. Immense crowds on shore. All the most eminent and respectable people looking on. Lugger comes in. Motor engine on board, not a Pallas Athene sports model engine, but one something more on the lines of your Ford. Flag flies at truck, skull and crossbones and all that. Thrills. Cheers. Newspaper men writing like fury. Photographers snapping their camera shutters. Publicity. Widest possible publicity. Dummy cargo landed. Pack horses loaded. Bales carried into cave. Cheers die down. Show over. Crowds disperse to eat and drink. Then you and I and Linker land another little cargo."

"That, my lord, would, I fear, be smuggling."

"You might call it that."

"The penalties for smuggling are very severe, my lord."

"I'm disappointed in you, Hinton. I thought you were a sportsman. Lord Dollman said you were a sportsman, and I believed him. But here you are funkng a little flutter, when it's odds on, positively odds on. I should say nine to one on."

"The customhouse officers are very alert, my lord, very alert indeed, and they're sure to be particularly suspicious of a pageant like this. The very word smuggling, advertised as we hope to advertise it, is enough to make them watch us."

"That's just where you're wrong," said Jimmy. "It's our advertising which will put them off. Nobody who wanted to smuggle would put a paragraph to say so in every paper in England. Nobody who meant to smuggle would invite Uncle Evie and the bishop and all the other political and legal swells to be directors in the company. Don't you see, Hinton, that's just the sort of thing that puts the intelligent customhouse officer off the scent, and the more intelligent he is the certainer he's bound to be that there's nothing in it."

The reasoning was perfectly sound and ought to have convinced Hinton. Perhaps it did. Perhaps he had thought it all out himself before. But there was another difficulty which seemed less easy to deal with.

"You'll excuse me, my lord, but neither Mr. Linker nor I would care to take part in a scheme for defrauding the Revenue."

"Rot!" said Jimmy. "You really can't expect me to believe that, Hinton. Nobody could take that line. Just think how the good old Revenue defrauds us. It was only the other day I caught it at it. At least another fellow to whom I gave over the job caught it for me. And the thing had been going on for years. Income Tax. Hundreds of pounds that I oughtn't to have paid. I expect it's been doing the same thing to you and to Linker and Uncle Evie and everyone. So far as I can make out it defrauds everyone it can, and when it's caught doesn't even apologise. Now what's wrong about getting a bit of our own back? That's all we intend to do."

But Hinton remained obstinately unconvinced even by this argument. He shook his head gravely and sadly, adding a few words about Mr. Linker's integrity and his own high principles.

Jimmy threw away the end of his cigarette. Then he slipped on his waistcoat and coat.

"Very well, Hinton," he said, "I'll have nothing whatever to do with your measly pageant, and what's more I'll crab it in

every way I possibly can. I'll take care, so far as my friends are concerned, that it's a complete washout. I know perfectly well that you and Linker, and I expect half the fishermen in the village, are going to do exactly what I've said. Why the devil else should you be going into the thing at all, spending money and so on? If you won't let me chip in along with the rest of you, I'll do you all the harm I can, and you can tell your friend Linker what I say. If he calls here this morning I simply won't see him. You can tell him that, too."

Chapter XII

Mr. Linker presented himself--the phrase is a most unpleasant one. No self-respecting writer would use it if he could find any other to express his meaning. He would prefer to say "Mr. Linker arrived" or "Mr. Linker came." Or perhaps "Mr. Linker turned up," or "blew in." Unfortunately "presented himself" is the only way of describing the unctuous politeness, the self-satisfied smugness, the deprecating humility and the formal correctness with which Mr. Linker, at the Manor House door, asked for Lord Colavon. It is therefore necessary to use the words.

Mr. Linker presented himself, early, while Sir Evelyn and his guests were still lingering over breakfast. He was shown into the library and his presence announced by Hinton.

"Mr. Linker," he said to Jimmy, "wishes to speak to your lordship when convenient."

"Tell the blighter," said Jimmy, "to call again this day fortnight and say that I won't be here then."

He looked Hinton straight in the face as he spoke. His meaning was perfectly clear. He was fulfilling the threat that he had made an hour before in his bedroom.

Sir Evelyn, who was enjoying the society of the two girls, did not want to be disturbed. But he was aware of Linker's political importance and was most unwilling to offend him.

"Perhaps," he said, "I'd better see him."

"Don't do anything of the sort, Uncle Evie," said Jimmy. "I know that kind of rotter and, if he once gets talking you'll not stop him under an hour and a half. Just let Hinton take my message."

Sir Evelyn hesitated. He knew that, once caught by Linker, his morning would be gone, and he had been looking forward to taking Beth Appleby and Mary Lambert round his rock garden. They were very agreeable and well-mannered young women. Jimmy might have had his way and the message might have been sent--though perhaps not delivered--by Hinton, if Beth had not recognised the name of Linker. She had heard a good deal about him from the dressmaker maid and knew that he was the man who had supplied her and Mary with clothes.

"Let me go and see him," she said. "I want to thank him for the lovely things he sent, and so does Mary. We'll both go. If I could afford it I'd order half a dozen nighties of the same pattern. I never had anything so deliciously frivolous before."

"Offer him a free advertisement in Lilith's Lispings," said Jimmy, "and perhaps he'll give you a few."

"I might do that," said Beth. "It would be a paragraph practically ready-made for next week, and that's something, even if I don't get as much as a pocket handkerchief out of him. And I ought to. 'Lilith lisp that Mr. Linker, the well-known lingerie expert of Morriton St. James, who is perhaps England's greatest artist in nightdresses, is about to startle the world with an original design in--whisper, belovedest, if there are any men in the room--cami-knickers. Anyone with a real regard for undies--and which of us has not?--will at once write to----' I must ask him his address when I see him. Come on, Mary, and let's try. An ad. like that ought to be worth something."

"Suppose we all go," said Sir Evelyn, still anxious to be polite to the influential Linker.

"I shan't stir a step," said Jimmy. "I hate that kind of oily beggar."

Hinton held the door open for the two ladies and Sir Evelyn. When they had left the room he turned to Jimmy.

"Beg pardon, my lord," he said, "I took the opportunity of speaking a few words to Mr. Linker before announcing him."

"Oh, you did, did you? I hope you told him not to allow anyone to tempt him into trying to defraud the revenue."

Hinton smiled feebly.

"I understood from Mr. Linker," he said, "that he was inclined to consider your lordship's proposal sympathetically."

"He'll have to do a great deal more than consider it. However, if he's got that far I may as well see him."

Linker was a disagreeable little man with a pallid face, almost colourless shifty eyes and damp hands. He received Beth's thanks with many bows, but did not seem much excited by her offer of an advertisement in Lilith's Lispings.

"Very much obliged to your ladyship, I'm sure," was all he said.

He addressed Mary Lambert as "your ladyship" too, being perhaps under the impression that any ladies who associated on good terms with an earl must have titles of their own. He got away from the subject of his own business as soon as Jimmy entered the room, and made his appeal on behalf of the pageant.

He said very much what Hinton had said in the morning, dwelling on the political advantage to Sir Evelyn of being associated with a popular and successful pageant--an advantage not at all obvious to anyone else--and the value to the pageant of Lord Colavon's help, which was, if possible, less obvious still.

"I told Hinton to tell you," said Jimmy, "that I'm not going to touch your pageant. I'm not going to have anything to do with it. I'm not even going to see it."

"Oh, Jimmy," said Mary, "it might be rather fun."

"Aunt Agatha's pageant!" said Beth. "You must help if you can, though I don't see what good you can do except being a patron, and you're that already."

"Now, I might be useful," said Mary--"really useful. I'm an actress, Mr. Linker."

"Indeed, your ladyship?" said Linker.

He did not seem impressed by this announcement. He perhaps thought that Mrs. Eames was capable of managing the acting part of it by herself.

"I've always longed to produce a play," said Mary, "and a pageant would be nearly as good."

"I'm sorry your mind is so definitely made up," said Sir Evelyn to Jimmy. "Mr. Linker seems to think--- The prospects of the Party in Morriton St. James--my own position as prospective candidate---"

"If it's going to help you, Uncle Evie--but I'm blest if I see how it can."

"Mr. Linker," said Sir Evelyn, "attaches great importance to the success of the pageant. I think perhaps that you ought---"

"I need scarcely say, my lord," said Linker, "that in the management of the pageant we should be prepared to meet your lordship's wishes in every way."

"In every way?"

Jimmy looked Linker straight in the face and then turned his eyes on Hinton, who was standing near the door.

"In *every* way," said Linker, nervously but with the needed emphasis.

"Certainly, my lord," said Hinton, "in every way."

"Very well," said Jimmy. "As you all want me I'll do my best; but what exactly is it that you expect me to do?"

"Get me a job with a good advertisement attached to it," said Mary.

"Help Aunt Agatha," said Beth.

Linker explained his wishes at greater length. Lord Colavon might undertake the purchase of the lugger and allow that fact to be advertised. He might superintend the rigging under the direction of Sir Evelyn. He might interest his friends in the pageant.

"And steer the lugger when the great day comes," said Jimmy.

"Certainly, if your lordship wishes."

The assurance was definite enough and entirely satisfactory to Jimmy. The conversation passed on to the subject of patrons of the pageant. Linker pressed on Sir Evelyn, who had already done a great deal, the necessity of securing as many influential names as possible.

"Another bishop would be very desirable, sir," he said.

"But why do you want so many bishops?" said Mary. "Aren't they very liable to make objections? My Nautch Girl dance is perfectly all right, but---"

"Although a Nonconformist myself," said Linker, "I cannot but be aware of the social position of the dignitaries of the Established Church. They would certainly be of great value to the pageant."

He mentioned in a reverential whisper the name of a popular ecclesiastic, one of the few who are thoroughly well known to the public outside church circles.

"If a few actresses would be of any use," said Mary, "I might get them."

"As skittish as possible," said Jimmy. "Some ladies of the gayer kind will be wanted to balance all the bishops."

"And if," Linker addressed Sir Evelyn again, "you could see your way to inviting----"

He named a very great statesman, a man with a European reputation for the astute manipulation of international Congresses, Assemblies of the League of Nations and such things.

"Not necessarily to be present at the pageant," said Linker apologetically. "That would be asking too much. But if we might make use of his name."

"Do get him, Sir Evelyn," said Beth. "He'd be worth pounds to me in paragraphs. He and the bishops and Mary's actresses all together."

Linker went on doggedly and shamelessly with his suggestions. There was scarcely anyone of eminence whom he did not suggest, except members of the Royal Family, and Sir Evelyn fully expected him to ask for a prince or two soon. He seemed to be working up in that direction, and at last, when he was plainly getting to the end of his list, he hesitated and apologised over a final name. It would scarcely have surprised anyone if he had mentioned the King himself.

"And perhaps," he said, "we might secure the name of----"

He looked round among his listeners as if uncertain to whom he ought to appeal for the man he wanted.

"The name of Mr. East," he said at last, "would be of the greatest value to us."

"Mr. East?" said Sir Evelyn vaguely.

He had never heard of Mr. East.

"Mr. E. P. East," said Linker, as if that explained the thing.

"Who is he?" said Sir Evelyn.

"Mr. E. P. East," said Linker, "is the Head Surveyor of Customs and Excise in this district."

Beth and Mary were totally uninterested in this suggestion. The name of Mr. E. P. East would be useless for a paragraph and promised no desirable publicity. Sir Evelyn was still as much puzzled as when he first heard the name. He failed to see the value of Mr. East as a patron.

"Of course," he said, "if you really want him I might be able to secure him."

Jimmy, after looking hard at Linker's totally expressionless face, turned away and whistled softly.

Chapter XIII

The interview with Linker dragged itself to an end at last and the man bowed himself out of the room. Sir Evelyn took the two girls out to his rock garden and enjoyed himself. He had long been cut off from the society of cheerful and pretty young women who wanted to be agreeable to him and were clever enough to show an interest, which no one under fifty can really feel, in the names and nature of unattractive plants. Sir Evelyn, though old enough to enjoy rock plants, was not too old to enjoy pretty girls. A happy position and rare, for as a rule rock plants only become interesting after pretty girls have ceased to attract.

Jimmy settled down for an hour's serious work in the butler's pantry where the Manor House telephone was kept. He began with the proprietor of the garage in Morriton St. James, went into all the symptoms of the Pallas Athene's breakdown, found that a diagnosis had been made and that a major operation would be required. There was little hope of the car running again for a week. After that he tried a trunk call to the office of the makers of the car. This was a difficult thing to procure but he did it in the end and had the satisfaction of telling a gentleman, described to him as "the boss" exactly what sort of car the Pallas Athene was. "The boss" retaliated by describing in vivid terms the kind of man who was fool enough to drive a perfectly new car, which had never been run in, at the rate of sixty miles an hour for several hundred miles.

He had no direct evidence that the Pallas Athene had been driven in this way, but he knew something of Jimmy's reputation as a motorist, and he felt quite safe in making the accusation.

It is creditable to Jimmy that he kept his temper during both conversations. The garage proprietor kept his and the "boss" only pretended to be angry as a means of self-defence against any claim which might be made on him under the terms of his guarantee. Considering how trying motor cars can be when they choose to behave badly this general self-restraint goes far to show that we are really becoming a civilised people, a thing which observers of our habit of going on strike might be inclined to doubt.

When Sir Evelyn and the two girls returned from the rock garden Jimmy told them the news that there was no chance of getting away in the Pallas Athene. He spoke indecisively about trains and still more doubtfully about hiring another car. Sir Evelyn cut him short with a hospitable invitation to the whole party to stay with him for a week or a fortnight, until the Pallas Athene was repaired, or perhaps until the Hailey Compton pageant was over.

Beth murmured a polite refusal which it was quite clear she did not really mean. Pressed by Sir Evelyn she confessed that gossip about London society can be invented anywhere and that the Lispings of Lilith could be just as well written in the Manor House at Morriton St. James as in the flat in Battersea. She also said something about an opportunity for visiting her aunt at Hailey Compton. Sir Evelyn cut her short.

"You will be doing me a favour," he said, "by staying on till the pageant is over. I want someone to help me through with that affair."

Mary Lambert was franker. She had no work to do in London. There was a possibility of her getting a job, in connection with the pageant, which, even if unpaid would bring her name before the public. She was also, though she only hinted at this, much more comfortable in the Manor House than she had ever been anywhere in her life before, and--this consideration weighs a little with all of us--it is very convenient to be housed and fed free, especially when earning no salary. A few clothes--she and Beth said this simultaneously--could be sent for from London.

Jimmy had no hesitation about accepting the invitation. He, perhaps he alone, took his uncle's polite assurance at its face value.

"You do want someone to look after you, Uncle Evie," he said, "and that's a fact. I'm not saying anything against Hinton or Linker, not a word. Both excellent fellows, no doubt. But they give me the impression of being pretty sharp men of business. When I think of that tenner of mine which Hinton trousered yesterday afternoon, and of what Linker's little bill will probably be I tremble to think of the extent to which the two of them will probably stick you."

Sir Evelyn smiled amiably at the suggestion that he needed a protector and made a mild joke about his nephew's fitness for the part of tutor to innocent old age.

"Besides," Jimmy went on, "I'm getting quite keen on this pageant of yours and rather see myself in the part of captain of the lugger."

When it was settled that the whole party would remain at the Manor House Jimmy suggested a drive over to Hailey Compton as a suitable amusement for the day. Like most men over fifty Sir Evelyn dreaded picnics and suggested that they should lunch comfortably at home before starting. He was strongly opposed to Beth's suggestion that they should ask Mrs. Eames for luncheon. But neither Beth nor Mary wanted to spend the rest of the morning in the rock garden, and a compromise was arranged. The party would take its own food, but eat it, along with anything Mrs. Eames provided, in the vicarage. This, like most compromises, combined the most objectionable features of both plans. The food would be picnic food, cold, sandwichy and scrappy, which was exactly what Sir Evelyn disliked. The company would be that of Mrs. Eames, which he dreaded.

An hour and a half later Sir Evelyn's little car, this time driven in masterful fashion by Jimmy, reached the long stretch of bare, undulating land above Hailey Compton. The road, a narrow white belt, stretched straight until it seemed to end abruptly on the very edge of the cliff. The car sped on faster than that car had ever gone before. Jimmy eyed the road in front of him suspiciously.

"Is there a way down," he said, "or do we stop here and take to parachutes?"

"It's very steep," said Sir Evelyn. "Do be careful."

"Brakes all right?" said Jimmy without slowing down.

"I hope so. I trust so," said his uncle.

Jimmy, though daring, was not reckless. With rapid motion of hand and foot he changed gear. The car sped forward with a shrill cry. Jimmy changed gear again, and took the first of the sharp bends at a little over twenty-five miles an hour. His passengers clung tightly to the sides of the car. The brakes stuttered. The low gear cried more shrilly. Another corner was safely passed.

"Nasty place on a foggy night," said Jimmy, "if you happened to be trying it for the first time."

He went boldly on, for it was neither night nor foggy. The sun glittered on a calm sea far below them. The steep, thatched roofs of the fishermen's cottages were seen, as roofs seldom are except by those who go about in aeroplanes. The little boat haven, in reality a slimy pool, looked like a glowing gem. The vicarage, somewhat apart from the village, was modestly picturesque like a shy girl in light summer clothes. The church, its squat, grey tower bathed in sunlight, stood on guard above the village, perched on the little plateau, the sea and the cliffs below it, a tall, rugged cliff rising high behind and above it.

"Isn't it perfectly lovely?" said Mary, who had never seen Hailey Compton before.

She had got over her first fear of the steepness of the descent. Sir Evelyn, sitting beside her in the back of the car, was still too nervous to join in admiration of the scenery.

"I do wish he'd be more cautious," was all he could say.

Jimmy, guided by Beth, swept along the village street, charged the short hill to the vicarage gate and pulled up before the door.

Mrs. Eames rushed out to welcome them. She kissed Beth vehemently, grasped Sir Evelyn's hand and shook it with affectionate violence, was introduced to Mary, and kissed her, was introduced to Jimmy and looked for a moment as if she meant to kiss him.

"You'll lunch with us, of course," she said. "I'm so sorry Timothy isn't here, Sir Evelyn, and he won't be back for lunch I'm afraid, unless I send for him. But I will send for him. Gladys shall go. He's up in the church."

"Still?" said Sir Evelyn.

He was a little surprised. Mr. Eames had retired to the church three weeks before. It seemed scarcely possible that he had been there ever since.

"Your poor dear uncle," said Mrs. Eames to Beth, "is more tiresome than I've ever known him before. Not that I want to say a word against him. He's a darling, but it is tiresome of him to spend all of every day in the church. I never see him except at night, and do you know what I found out yesterday? He's taken a spade and a pickaxe up there with him. At least, if he hasn't taken them I don't know what's happened to them. I can't find them. The man who does the garden wanted the spade yesterday, and while he was looking for it he found that the pickaxe was gone too. So annoying."

"Couldn't be digging graves, could he?" said Jimmy not very helpfully.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Eames. "Poor Timothy never does anything as useful as that. You wouldn't think it of him if you knew him, Lord Colavon, and of course it may not be he who has taken the spade. I only said he had because I can't think of anyone else who would take it. But what would he want a pickaxe for inside the church? And he never comes out. He just sits there all day, reading Greek, you know."

Sir Evelyn, though he did not say so, was of opinion that the vicar must have gone mad. St. Paul, who also seems to have read Greek books, was suspected of having been driven insane through much learning. Something of the sort might have happened to Mr. Eames; but Sir Evelyn was more inclined to lay the blame on Mrs. Eames. He thought it likely that he would be mad too if he had been married to her.

"So you're really an actress," said Mrs. Eames, turning abruptly to Mary. "You did say she was a real actress, didn't you, Beth? Isn't that lucky? You must know all about pageants, if you're an actress, and you'll be able to help us. I do want someone to help. You'll come and stay with us till the pageant's over, won't you? You can have Beth's room. Or if Beth comes too, you can share it. You'll come, won't you, Beth?"

"Miss Lambert and Miss Appleby," said Sir Evelyn, "have kindly consented to stay with me till the play is over."

"Quite right," said Mrs. Eames cheerfully. "They'll be far more comfortable with you. I'd love to have them both. You know that, Beth. But--well, you know what Gladys is like."

"But of course I'll help," said Mary. "I'll come over every day."

"How splendid. We'll have a rehearsal this afternoon. Gladys shall run round the village and tell the people. She'll like doing that far better than cooking lunch. I'm afraid there isn't very much for lunch. You see, I haven't been having regular meals since poor dear Timothy took to living in the church. But we might have pancakes. You like pancakes, don't you, Sir Evelyn?"

"We shouldn't dream of trespassing on your kindness, Mrs. Eames," said Sir Evelyn. "We brought our own luncheon with us."

"So if you'll just lend us knives and forks, Aunt Agatha," said Beth.

Many women, slaves to conventionality, would have been vexed to think that guests, arriving at luncheon time, had brought their own food with them. Mrs. Eames was not even ruffled.

"But you must have pancakes too," she said, "and scrambled eggs. I'm rather good at scrambled eggs. And luckily the hens are all laying just now. Generally they do nothing but go broody at this time of year. It may have been excitement about the pageant which kept them from sitting. Not that they understand what's happening, poor things, but excitement gets into the air. So we can have pancakes and scrambled eggs. I know you like scrambled eggs, Sir Evelyn."

"Oh, greatly," said Sir Evelyn. "But I really wish you wouldn't take so much trouble."

"It won't be any trouble," said Mrs. Eames. "Gladys's aunt is nearly sure to be in the kitchen, and if so she can make the pancakes. Gladys can't or won't or both. I wish I could offer you an omelette. Beth, dear, can you make omelettes?"

"I can," said Mary Lambert. "At least I think I can. Do let me try."

"I used to think I could," said Mrs. Eames, "and sometimes I can, but not always. In fact generally my omelettes turn out to be scrambled eggs. That's why I think it's better to say scrambled eggs at once. Then if they do happen to be omelettes it's a pleasant surprise, whereas if I said omelettes and then produced scrambled eggs Timothy might be disappointed. Come along, Mary dear. You won't mind my calling you Mary, will you. It's so stiff to go on saying Miss Lambert when we're going to make an omelette together. You can get out the plates and lay the table, Beth. You'll find a table cloth somewhere. I'm sure Sir Evelyn would like a table cloth and I have several if only they're clean. The fact is, I never have a table cloth when Timothy isn't here. I know I ought to. So bad for Gladys when I don't."

She took Mary by the arm and led her off to the kitchen.

"I think," said Beth, "that I'd better go and look for the table cloth."

"Wait one moment," said Jimmy, "till I get the luncheon basket out of the car and then I'll be with you. I feel sure it'll take two of us to find that table cloth."

"Am I to be left alone?" said Sir Evelyn. "I don't like it. If Mrs. Eames comes back and finds me unprotected---- Perhaps the best thing for me to do would be to join the vicar in the church. Do you suppose he took the pickaxe as a weapon of defence? I feel as if I should like something of the sort."

"Your aunt," said Jimmy, a few minutes later, "is perfectly priceless."

They were searching in the dining-room for the table cloth and so far had not come on a trace of it.

"There's a lot of go about her," said Beth.

"Go! I should think there was. I only wish there was half as much in the Pallas Athene. I wonder now, if I asked her very nicely, would she come over to Morriton St. James some day and take a look at that car. If anyone could get a move on the wretched thing it would be your aunt. She'd make anything in the world hop up and run about."

Chapter XIV

The rehearsal in the afternoon was a success, though tiring to all who took part in it.

Gladys, useless as housemaid or cook, showed that there was something she could do really well when she was turned into a messenger. Released quite unexpectedly from duties she detested, she sped joyfully round the village, summoning performers to the mouth of the cave at three o'clock. Her excited account of the ladies and gentlemen who had come from London to organise the pageant, roused fresh interest in an affair which the people were beginning to find a little tiresome.

Gladys did more than summon the performers. She summoned everyone else too, insisting that the whole village should turn out. She even gave, in the name of the vicar, a totally unauthorised order to the schoolmaster that the children should be released an hour before the proper time. The schoolmaster knew quite well that the vicar had sent no such message; and would have acted without authority if he had; but he wanted to see the rehearsal himself, so he pretended to believe Gladys. In this he showed not only self-indulgence but wisdom. It was doubtful whether he could have kept the children in school if he had wanted to.

Mrs. Eames's arrangements had been carefully made, and the great scene thoroughly thought out. Old Bunce's boat, representing the lugger, lay a hundred yards off the mouth of the cave. At the oars sat eight of the steadiest and most reliable men in the village, chosen to be the crew of the lugger on the day of the performance. With these men there was no trouble at all. They took the business seriously and were ready to do exactly as Mrs. Eames bade them. They sat, over their outstretched oars, ready to pull to the shore the moment the signal was given.

Tommy Whittle and his mentally deficient brother were the signallers. At the actual performance they were to light a flare on top of the church tower. At rehearsal they merely waved a flag from the churchyard wall. The lighting of flares in broad daylight would have been foolishly wasteful, and they could not get into the tower, even for purposes of rehearsal, because the vicar kept all the church doors locked. Their part was clear, and Tommy thoroughly understood it. His brother, in spite of his feebleness of mind, was quite capable of doing what he was told. Indeed he was more likely to obey orders literally and swiftly than a man who could think for himself; which shows that it is a mistake to develop the intelligence of soldiers, trade unionists, the rank and file of political parties, and others who depend on discipline for their efficiency.

On the green beside the boat haven, where the nets were dried and the geese paraded, it was arranged that eight pack horses should stand ready to be loaded with smuggled goods. Each horse was to be in charge of two girls. This was perhaps not strictly in accordance with historical precedent, but Mrs. Eames felt that some female parts were required and the holding of the heads of pack horses seemed the most suitable thing for girls to do. Only one horse could be secured for the rehearsals, so the sixteen girls took it in turn to hold the creature.

On the occasion of the great rehearsal summoned by Gladys the whole sixteen girls turned out and argued fiercely, each pair alleging that it was their turn to hold the horse. Mrs. Eames's first duty, when she came down with her party from the vicarage, was to settle this dispute, a very difficult thing, for the mothers of the girls were all there eager to support their daughters' cause. This made a total of twenty-eight women (four mothers had two daughters each), who all talked at once and loudly. Perhaps only Mrs. Eames among living Englishwomen could have talked down so many competitors. The horse itself, an elderly wise beast, strolled about the green, nibbling at the grass. It would have been there when wanted even if no girl had held its head. Village maidens, when intent on claiming their rights, are voluble. Their mothers, having had more practice, talk even more and faster. All, mothers and daughters, talked at once. Sir Evelyn, who walked with Mrs. Eames at the head of the party from the vicarage, looked hopelessly at the turmoil. Jimmy and the two girls stopped at the edge of the green, waiting to see how Mrs. Eames would deal with the situation. Her plan was simple. She talked faster, louder and with shorter pauses for breath than anyone else. One by one the girls were battered into silence by a hailstorm of words. One by one their mothers gave up the unequal contest. Then Mrs. Eames selected two girls to hold the horse, and, by way of compensation for disappointment, promised that a little later Mary Lambert would teach them all the proper way to do it, the way proper to the occasion, the way horses are held on the stage.

"Miss Lambert," said Mrs. Eames, "is a real actress, and she knows all about pageants and exactly how things ought to be done. As soon as the rehearsal is over you shall all come back here and she'll show you."

Mary Lambert had never held a horse in her life on or off the stage. She said so to Mrs. Eames in an appealing whisper.

"Or if she doesn't teach you that," said Mrs. Eames, "she'll teach you something else quite as nice. But you must keep quiet now and let me get on with the rehearsal. What will you teach them, Mary?"

"I'll teach them to dance," she said. "I'll teach them my Nautch Girl dance. It's tremendously fetching and they'll be able to learn their part quite easily. You'll be able to fit it in somewhere, won't you, Mrs. Eames?"

Sir Evelyn protested feebly against a Nautch Girl dance in a pageant of eighteenth century English life; but he was not allowed to say very much. Mrs. Eames welcomed the proposal and explained just where and when the dance could take place.

That settled the trouble on the green; but worse trouble waited at the mouth of the cave.

All children have an instinct which enables them to know with certainty when they will be most troublesome to their elders, and a desire, which they make no effort to suppress, to collect together in just that place. The Hailey Compton school children, who might have found amusement in helping their elder sisters to hold the horse or in watching the Whittles waving the signal flag, preferred to gather at the mouth of the cave. Having unexpectedly escaped from school they were full of vitality and spirits. The whole sixty of them ran rapidly to and fro in different directions, leaped from rock to rock with shouts of joy, and often fell, the tumbles being followed by cries of pain.

Besides the children there were some thirty or forty village people who had no part in the pageant gathered at the mouth of the cave. Their number was increased by the arrival of the fourteen girls who had been told not to hold the horse, and the whole twelve mothers. Mrs. Eames had to deal with them as well as with the children.

Her difficulties were increased by young Jim Bunce, son of the man chosen to be captain of the lugger. He had been given the part of leader of the men on shore who landed the cargo. He had lost a complicated arrangement of ropes and pulleys which he called a tackle. This was a valuable, according to his account an indispensable, stage property. Nothing, so he said, could be done unless the tackle was found.

"How are us to unload the boat without we have a tackle?" he asked, and kept on asking in a steady, emotionless monotone.

He regarded Mrs. Eames as responsible for the tackle, blamed her for the loss and seemed to take it for granted that she either knew where the thing was or possessed some means of finding it out. He did not actually say so, but his tone implied that if the rehearsal and the final performance broke down, as they would unless the tackle was found, Mrs. Eames would have no one to blame except herself. He had a statement which he made repeatedly and very slowly about the loss. After the last rehearsal he had left the tackle coiled up and in good order on top of a rock far above high-water mark just inside the cave. From that rock it had disappeared. This must have been true, for he repeated it at least twenty times without the smallest variation of detail.

While Mrs. Eames appealed to the unwanted people to go away, Jimmy Bunce appealed to her to find his tackle. While she pursued flying children he followed her. When she caught a child he caught her and repeated his statement. When she paused breathless after vain pursuit of a swift child, Jimmy Bunce was at her side. Sometimes he attributed the loss of the tackle to evilly disposed people inspired by the devil who had entered into them. Sometimes he seemed to think that the devil had acted personally in the matter, without using human agency. But--whether man or devil were the culprit--he held that Mrs. Eames was responsible.

She ought to have managed somehow to bring to naught the evil that the craft and subtlety of the devil or man had worked against Jimmy Bunce. If she had not done or could not do that, then the vicar, so Jimmy hinted, ought to give up saying the Litany.

Gladys managed to add a little to Mrs. Eames's difficulties. She had been given a responsible and important job to do. The signallers, Whittle and his brothers, could not see how the preparations for landing were getting on, because the churchyard wall, where they were stationed, was just above the mouth of the cave. Someone had to run off to the end of the beach and tell them when all was ready for the signal to be given. Gladys undertook to do this and promised to stand waving her arms in full view of the Whittles when the time came for the arrival of the boat. She was eager and excited, so eager and excited that she ran after Mrs. Eames wherever she went, asking whether her time of action had yet come.

Mary Lambert viewed the scene with professional calm. She was accustomed to a certain amount of confusion at early rehearsals and felt confident that things would settle down at the end. In the meantime she caught Mrs. Eames whenever she could and asked intelligent and important questions. "Where," for instance, "would the spectators be on the day of the performance?" "Where would the orchestra be placed?" "What kind of platform would be provided for the Nautch Girl dance?"

Mrs. Eames, one of those fortunate people who enjoy fuss, replied to her as she replied to Jimmy Bunce and Gladys, without a sign of irritation, though sometimes a little hurriedly.

Sir Evelyn was gloomy. It did not seem to him possible that order would ever be achieved or the rehearsal be done. He asked himself, not for the first time, whether he had not been a fool to mix himself up with any undertaking managed by a woman like Mrs. Eames. Foreseeing reproaches afterwards, he bitterly regretted having asked his friends to be patrons of the pageant. He sat on a rock with his back to the turmoil and gazed out to sea. There, a hundred yards or so from the shore, lay Bunce's laden boat. The crew sat bent over their outstretched oars, calm and indifferent to the passing of time. Now and then when the rising tide carried their boat eastward, they dipped their oars, and with quiet, effortless motion regained their position off the mouth of the cave. Sir Evelyn, smoking cigarette after cigarette, marvelled at a patience which he could not hope to imitate.

Young Bunce left Mrs. Eames for a while and fastened on Sir Evelyn. He was not an Ancient Mariner, and his eye was more fishy than glittering, but he held his auditor as firmly as Coleridge's hero held his. The tale of the lost tackle was not so long as that of the lost ship, but Sir Evelyn had to listen to it three times and always with the feeling--successfully conveyed also to Mrs. Eames--that he was to blame for the disaster. Sir Evelyn tried the plan constantly adopted by worried men. An Anglo-Saxon king gave Dane Geld to the invaders of the land. Modern statesmen give increasing doles to the insurgent proletariat. Sir Evelyn gave young Bunce ten shillings with which to buy another tackle. Bunce accepted the money, explaining as he did so that tackles are made and not bought and that it would take at least a week to achieve a new one. But the ten shillings was not wasted. Unlike the ancient Dane Geld and the modern dole, it achieved its object. Jimmy Bunce went away. He feared that if he stayed he might be forced to give the money back. Although tackles cannot be bought other things can, and young Bunce wanted to keep the money if he could.

"Beth," said Jimmy, "I'm almost fed up with this."

They had been watching Mrs. Eames's efforts to get her company together and to clear the stage of superfluous people. They had even tried to help her. When it became clear that they were doing more harm than good they stood on a rock above the tumult and watched again. It was after ten minutes of this second watching that Jimmy became bored.

"Let's toddle off somewhere," he said.

"Where?" said Beth. "Back to the vicarage?"

"I suppose," said Jimmy, "that there's no chance of raising a couple of cocktails anywhere?"

"There's James Hinton's pub. But----"

"No go. Hinton would manage it if he was there. Not a fellow in England is better at dry Martinis than Hinton. But he's not there. He's probably buying a dress shirt for me and a ready-made dinner jacket from his friend Linker, so we may regard the cocktails as off."

"Would you care to look at the church?"

"No. Why should I?"

"People generally do in strange places," said Beth. "It's one of the things that's always done."

"Can't think why. I hate churches myself."

"So do I." said Beth; "but there's nothing else to see in Hailey Compton except---- What about exploring the cave?"

"Is there anything to explore?"

"It's supposed to go miles and miles inland," said Beth, "and nobody's ever been to the end of it. They say it's haunted."

"Ghosts of dead smugglers! Let's go and find one."

"There won't be any if I go," said Beth. "Nothing spooky ever comes off when I'm there. I've tried lots of times. Spiritualist seances and so on. The beastly things work all right, so I'm told, till I come, but then they simply dry up."

"I'm not particularly spooky myself," said Jimmy, "but we might try. Hunting the elusive ghost would be better than standing here, even if we don't run one to earth."

They climbed down from their rock and pushed their way among the groups of pageant actors, unwanted spectators, and children who were beginning to tire of running about. They scrambled over a ridge of sharp rocks and dropped on

to a broad track covered, like the beach outside, with round white stones. The sound of the voices behind them grew fainter. Even Mrs. Eames's voice died away. Their steps upon the rolling stones made a hollow, growling sound which reverberated from the walls and roof of the cave, multiplied and increased in volume.

The light grew feebler as they went on. They felt, rather than saw, that they were ascending steeply. But the roof of the cave was still remotely high, only dimly discernible in the gloom, and the walls were still far apart. There were no signs of coming to the end.

Beth turned and looked round. The sea and sky were like a picture in a frame, very distant, incredibly bright. Bunce's boat, the crew still crouched over their oars, was plainly to be seen. The moving figures at the entrance to the cave were silhouetted black outlines against the background of sea and sky. Beth, in a voice which sounded strangely deep, called Jimmy to look.

After that they saw the world outside no more. The cave bent to the right. The light got feebler, so dim that now and then Jimmy had to strike matches in order to be able to see what was before them. It was plain at last that the walls were closing in, that the way was narrowed and the roof lower than it had been.

"Getting near the end," said Jimmy. "If we're to come on a ghost of any sort it must be now or never."

Chapter XV

"Listen," said Beth suddenly.

She spoke in a gasp, the toneless whisper of someone who is frightened.

From far above them came sounds, sometimes of light tapping, sometimes as if a man were scraping at the roof of the cave. Jimmy struck another match, one of the last left in his box, and held it out in front of him. They had reached the end of the cave. The roof above them descended sharply and met a wall of solid rock through which there was no possibility of passing. But in the roof there was a hole. The match held aloft revealed it, very black, wide as the chimneys of the fireplaces to be found in old houses. It was from the hole that the sounds of tapping and scraping came.

Suddenly from very far up came a new sound, a distant rattling. It increased and drew nearer. A large stone, striking the sides of the chimney sharply as it descended, crashed at their feet and was shattered into atoms.

Such a thing was alarming enough without any suggestion of the supernatural about it. The force with which the stone struck the ground showed that it had fallen from a considerable height. Jimmy seized Beth by the arm and pulled her to one side of the cave, out of reach of other stones which might come crashing down.

"Oh," gasped Beth, "what is it?"

"Sounds rather like a smuggler's ghost pelting us," said Jimmy. "A damned dangerous thing to do in a place like this without shouting 'Heads' or 'Fore' or any kind of warning."

"Jimmy," said Beth, "I'm terrified."

She was experiencing for the first time in her life a kind of fear which she had often laughed at. It is easy enough to be cheerfully sceptical about ghosts in broad daylight and among familiar things, or to boast of immunity from spookiness when nothing unusual is happening. It is quite another matter when stones take to falling out of a black unknown into a narrow, gloomy place, where every movement and every word make hollow sounds, horribly suggestive of infernal things, when the terrifying crash echoes from rocks on the right, on the left and above, when there is no way of accounting for such happenings. Then cheery scepticism is likely to be chased away by awe. Beth was a prey to the kind of fear in which investigators of the occult find a painful delight, an excruciating ecstasy, which, in apologising to the rest of us, the experimenters call scientific curiosity.

She clung tight to Jimmy's arm with both hands.

For a minute or two they stood waiting and listening. No more stones dropped down the chimney. The noise of tapping and scratching which they had heard ceased. There was complete silence, as dull and heavy as the atmosphere of the cave. It was Jimmy who broke it. He had been puzzled by the noise above him and startled by the falling stone, but he had not felt the fear of the supernatural which had swept over Beth. When he spoke it was in a tone very reassuring to the girl who clung to him.

"Futile sort of old ghost," he said. "I don't call one stone much of a demonstration, do you?"

"But," said Beth, who was recovering her self-possession, "it wasn't really a ghost. I mean to say, it couldn't have been. But what was it? Who dropped the stone?"

"If you ask me, I'm inclined to think----"

There he stopped abruptly. The noises of tapping and scraping had begun again. Tap, tap, tap, far up above their heads, and then a crunching sound. It was as if someone at a considerable distance was striking with a pickaxe and shovelling up loose earth. Jimmy listened intently.

"If you ask me," he repeated, "I'm inclined to think that somebody is trying to knock a hole in the roof of this cave. What's above us here, Beth?"

"I don't know," said Beth. "The cliff, I suppose."

"Well, then, there's somebody on the top of the cliff digging a hole. Can't imagine what he wants to do such a thing for!"

He struck a match and looked up. The hole, a large space of inky blackness, was some six feet from the ground. It was wide and the rocks at its side were jagged.

"If I could get a grip on that craggy bit that is sticking out," said Jimmy, "I could pull myself up into the hole. It's probably easy enough climbing after that. Just stand clear for a minute while I jump. I'll have a try at it."

But Beth was not inclined to let him try. Instead of standing clear she clung to him more tightly than before.

"Don't do it, Jimmy," she said.

"Still nervous about the smuggler's ghost?"

"I'm not thinking about ghosts. Suppose another stone came down when you were halfway up that chimney?"

That was a real peril and Jimmy was obliged to consider it. Jammed tight in what might very well prove to be a narrow passage he would be quite defenceless against a falling stone. As if to emphasise the reality of the risk, there came rumbling and clattering down the chimney a shower of pebbles and loose earth. Beth was startled again--so startled, that she loosed her grasp round Jimmy's elbow and flung her arms round his neck.

"Jimmy, dearest," she said, "you'll be killed if you go."

It is very likely that he would have been killed, for a small avalanche of stones, pebbles and earth came rushing down. The loose debris clattered and crashed on the floor of the cave, some of the stones rolling up to Beth's feet. Jimmy pulled her back still further from the hole.

"Don't go, Jimmy," she said.

"All right. I won't. It's not good enough. But I say, Beth----"

Relieved of her fear for him and far enough from the hole to feel safe herself, Beth realised that she was clinging very close to Jimmy. The position, though very pleasant for him, was embarrassing for her. She drew away quickly.

"I say, Beth," said Jimmy, "don't do that. What I mean to say is, go on doing that. Don't you think you ought to?"

"I'm quite sure I ought not. I can't think how I came to do it."

"If I say I'm going up the hole, you might do it again. Would you?"

"Certainly not."

"But when we're married," said Jimmy, "you'll more or less have to. I mean to say, it's the regular thing then. So I've always understood. And as we're engaged to be married now----"

"We're not."

"Well, as good as engaged."

"We're not as good as engaged. I've told you that a dozen times at least, Jimmy. The most that I ever said was that we might be some time or other."

"Can't see why not now," said Jimmy. "Here we are facing unknown dangers together, practically in the dark, and I've only one match left, pelted with stones by the ghosts of desperate smugglers, lost in the depths of a cavern measureless to man. If you won't agree to marry me now, Beth, I don't see how you ever will. It's a priceless opportunity. In all the novels I've ever read the heroine's maidenly resistance invariably collapses in the hour of peril--far less peril than ours, generally only a lion or a painted savage, absolutely nothing to a vengeful ghost."

"Jimmy, dear, don't be silly. I'm still a little frightened. Let's get out of this."

"If you're unmoved by the romance of the situation, though I don't see how anyone can be---- I say, just listen to that." The remote digger was apparently working harder than ever. The blows of iron on stone sounded clear and frequent. "How can you refuse to fall into the arms of your lover when a ghost is digging his own grave a few feet above your head?"

"Do talk sense, Jimmy, and take me out of this."

"I will. I'll do both. Talk sense first and then take you away. Uncle Evie was at me last night about you."

"About me?"

"Asking me why the deuce I didn't marry you."

"Is that what you call talking sense? Sir Evelyn couldn't have said that?"

"He did. He put it to me at the point of the bayonet. I can't remember his exact words, but what they amounted to was this: If I didn't marry you, he would. Now what do you say to that?"

"I say that you've got an extraordinarily inventive mind. Also that you oughtn't to tell lies about your uncle."

"It's not a lie," said Jimmy, "though I admit it's not the whole truth. The suggestion was that I should marry either you or Mary and that he'd marry the other, or rather that he'd marry one of you and I'd marry the other. I give you my solemn word of honour that that's what passed between us last night after you'd gone to bed."

"You give me your solemn word of honour that Sir Evelyn suggested----"

"As a matter of actual fact," said Jimmy, "the suggestion came from me. But Uncle Evie quite fell in with it. Quite. He hadn't a word to say against it."

"Very well," said Beth, "I'll marry your Uncle Evie as soon as he asks me, and then you can marry Mary if she'll have you, which she probably won't. So now that's settled."

"Very well. I'll give you a wedding present and all that. But now what about marrying me after Uncle Evie dies? I don't want him to die, for he's always been very decent to me. Still, nobody lives for ever, and he's well over sixty. What do you say to that?"

"If I'm ever left a widow and you're a widower about the same time--don't forget you promised to marry Mary--I'll marry you. Will that satisfy you?"

"It doesn't in the least. But I suppose it's as much as I'll get out of you to-day."

"You won't get even that unless you take me out of this beastly cave where I'm smothering for want of air and terrified out of my senses."

They stumbled back together to the bend in the cave from which it was possible to see the sunlight. Beth drew a deep breath of relief and hurried forward, as fast as it was possible to hurry over a track of round, rolling stones.

"Don't rush so, Beth," said Jimmy. "I'm out of breath, and there's something I want to say to you."

"If it's anything more about my marrying your uncle," said Beth, "I won't listen to it."

"It's not. It's something more about your marrying me."

They had reached the mouth of the cave. The rehearsal, well started at last, was going on in a serious and orderly way. Old Bunce's boat had reached the pool and was made fast to the rocks. Her cargo was being landed. Mrs. Eames shouted orders from the top of the rock off which she had dived on the day when Sir Evelyn first met her. The superfluous people and all the children were herded together under the charge of Mary Lambert, who prevented their interfering with the performance. Sir Evelyn, perched somewhat perilously beside Mrs. Eames, was looking on with satisfaction. Everybody was too busy and too deeply interested to take any notice of Beth and Jimmy when they came from the depths of the cave.

"Beth," said Jimmy, "I'm quite serious this time."

"So am I," said Beth. "I like you, Jimmy. I've always liked you; but I'm not going to marry a man who---- But I've told you all that a dozen times."

"You have," said Jimmy, "and I quite see your point. I'm a rotter, a footering butterfly, perching on the flowers of life instead of gathering honey like a good, laborious bee. I don't go in for work and all that sort of piffle. That's it, isn't it, Beth? That's what you say."

"Look at Aunt Agatha," said Beth, "married to a man who doesn't do anything, who just sits and moons and dreams."

"Hang it all, Beth, you can't think I'd spend my life shut up in a church if you married me. I'm not that sort at all."

"You'd spend your life playing about with motor-cars and things," she said. "And, Jimmy, dear, can't you see that I couldn't bear to be married to a man who didn't do anything?"

"I quite grasp that," said Jimmy.

"Then why go on worrying me? For it does worry me."

"I'm not going to worry you, Beth. What I want to do is to propose----"

"I won't be proposed to again to-day."

"I'm not going to propose in that sense of the word," said Jimmy. "I'm going to make a proposition. Suppose I go off now and unearth that smuggler's ghost, find out what he's at and why. Would you count that doing something? Something useful? Hang it all, Beth, I think you ought to. The old knights and fellows of that sort who went about killing dragons and giants were looked upon as most valuable members of society and the most conscientious girls were delighted to marry them. If I get rid of a ghost---- You may say what you like, Beth, but a ghost in a small village is a regular pest, much worse than most dragons. If I collar the malignant spirit of that smuggler and stop him throwing stones it'll be something done, won't it? A jolly sight more useful thing really than being chairman of a committee for infant welfare, which is the sort of thing you think I ought to do. If I smother that ghost, Beth, will you marry me?"

"I'll--I'll think about it, Jimmy."

Chapter XIV

"Very well," said Jimmy, "come up to the church."

"The church?"

"You suggested going to the church before we explored the cave. What's wrong about going there now?"

"But what do you want to go to the church for? You said you hated churches."

"The mediaeval knight," said Jimmy, "always went to church before he set out to slay dragons. He generally spent a whole day there, consecrating his sword and that sort of thing. Come on."

"I won't go to the church with you if you're going to do anything profane or make jokes about religion."

"I'm going to discover a ghost," said Jimmy. "You can't call that profane."

They passed through the middle of the rehearsal. Mrs. Eames shouted at them entreating them to stop and give advice about the proper way of handling kegs supposed to contain French brandy. Sir Evelyn descended from his perch and wanted to start a discussion about the rigging of the lugger. Jimmy took no notice of either of them. He waved his hand cheerfully to Mrs. Eames, and when his uncle caught him by the sleeve scarcely allowed himself to be stopped.

"Later on," he said. "I'll go into all that in an hour or so. Just at present I can't. I'm frightfully busy. I've a most pressing engagement. The whole future of the pageant depends on my keeping it. Come on, Beth."

They crossed the beach and reached the green. There they were approached by the two girls who had been left in charge of the horse. Earlier in the day they had been eager enough to be allowed to hold it. Now they were thoroughly tired of the job, and felt that they were missing all the fun that was going on at the mouth of the cave. They wanted to be released.

"Certainly not," said Jimmy. "Life isn't all fun. You ask this lady," he pointed to Beth, "and she'll tell you that the great thing is to be real and earnest and doing some jolly useful kind of work, holding a horse, for instance, or chasing ghosts or anything of that sort which is really hard work and is done for the sake of others. That's it, isn't it, Beth?"

Beth looked at the girls who wanted to be off and hated holding the horse. She looked at the horse, which also wanted to be off and hated being held.

"I really think," she said, "that Aunt Agatha wouldn't mind if they went away."

"Beastly inconsistent of you, Beth," said Jimmy. "I think you ought to tell those girls what you're always telling me. I mean about getting married. Now, listen to me, Millicent Pamela. And you, Gwendoline Irene--those are your names, I suppose."

The girls grinned shamefacedly. With an instinctive knowledge of the taste of village people he had got the girls' names very nearly right. One of them was Auriole Millicent and the other Eunice Gwendoline.

"The lady says that if you don't slay dragons or hold that horse or chase a ghost or do something like that, no nice man will ever marry you. That's it, isn't it, Beth?"

But the girls did not wait to hear what Beth had to say. They were prepared to sacrifice their chance of getting husbands rather than miss the gathering at the mouth of the cave.

Beth and Jimmy climbed the steep path which led to the church. The two Whittles, their flag signalling accomplished, had gone away. Jimmy walked slowly round the churchyard looking at the graves with some attention. The tombstones were all in place and looked as if they had not been disturbed for years. Not a single grave had been recently opened.

"What are you doing?" said Beth.

"Looking for the ghost," said Jimmy, "who's throwing stones through the roof of the cave."

He climbed on the wall of the churchyard and looked down, standing in the very spot which had been occupied by the Whittles an hour before. He saw the green, where the horse, released from bondage, was grazing quietly. He saw the stony beach. He saw the face of the cliff beyond the cave. He peered over and looked straight down. He turned and

looked at the cliff behind the church, a precipice of rugged rock.

"Well, I'm hanged," he said.

"What is the matter?" said Beth.

"I'm hanged if I thought that even the ghost of a smuggler would have done it," he said. "What lawless ruffians those fellows were! But even so I'd have expected them to have some regard for the church."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Beth.

"Well, you ought to know. And considering it was you who drove me on to do it I don't see how you can possibly not know."

"Drove you on to do what?"

"Find the ghost of the smuggler who's throwing stones. He must have dug a hole somewhere to throw them through, mustn't he? Even a ghost can't throw stones through solid earth. And he must have done it up here, for the place is right over the cave. My idea was that he was operating through a grave, his own very likely, but he isn't. Nothing could be more peacefully undisturbed than all these graves, not a tombstone so much as knocked sideways. Still there the facts are. Somebody is dropping stones from somewhere into the chimney at the end of the cave and if it isn't from a hole in the graveyard it must be from inside the church. The next thing is to go inside and look."

"But Uncle Timothy's there," said Beth, "and if anybody was digging a hole in the church he'd stop them."

"He might not. It all depends on who was digging. Lots of people would hesitate to interfere with the ghost of a smuggler."

The south door of the church was locked. The small door which led into the vestry was locked, too. The large west door under the tower had not been opened for years. Loud knocking on one door after the other brought no answer.

"Uncle Timothy," said Beth, "must have gone to sleep. I don't wonder. I expect Aunt Agatha keeps him awake most of the night telling him that he really ought to do something for the parish."

"So he ought," said Jimmy. "I quite agree with your aunt. I quite agree with you, too, Beth, when you say that sort of thing. I wonder if we could open a window and climb in."

"Church windows don't open," said Beth.

Perhaps some day they will, if the Modernists get their way. Then all sorts of dangerous draughts will blow the altar hangings about, dissipate the smell of incense and dying flowers, even disturb the heavy stuffiness of centuries of ordered piety. In the meanwhile Beth was right. Church windows are not made to open.

Next to getting in, which appeared to be impossible, the best thing was to look in. But here again there were difficulties. Church windows are set high in walls and cannot easily be reached. But Jimmy was a young man of great determination. He found a shed in a corner of the churchyard. In it the sexton kept a scythe, a mowing machine, some cans and a bier, a four-wheeled vehicle with rubber tyres. Jimmy wheeled it out and set it under a window. Beth protested. She feared that this use of a bier if not actually sacrilege was an offence against decency. Jimmy climbed up on the bier and peered through the window.

He had a clear view of the nave of the church. He could peer down into the pews, could see the pulpit, the font and the lectern. There was no sign that the pavement or flooring had been disturbed anywhere. Worshippers might have entered, had in fact entered, three days before, and sat in their accustomed seats and listened to all that they expected to hear without being struck by anything unusual in the condition of their church.

Jimmy moved the bier to a window in the chancel and climbed up on it again. He found himself looking down into the high-sided square pew, surrounded with curtains, which stood close to the chancel rails. It had been set apart a century before for the use of the lord of the manor. It had been unoccupied for at least fifty years by anyone, except the vicar, when he used it as a study and sat in one of the arm-chairs with the tattered carpet under his feet, reading Epictetus.

When Jimmy looked down into it the arm-chairs had been moved and piled into a corner. The carpet had been rolled up. The flooring had been removed. In a deep hole in the middle of the pew he saw the back of the Reverend Timothy Eames bent low over a spade.

"Well, I'm properly and completely damned," said Jimmy.

Beth was steadying the bier, which had a tendency to run away whenever Jimmy moved. She was very naturally

shocked at the use of this language by an unauthorised layman so near the church. The position of the clergy is quite different. They are actually commanded to say "damn" not only near but inside the church.

"Jimmy dear," she said, "do you remember where you are?"

"Get up here," he said, "and peep in. Then you'll forget where you are and either say 'damn' or something worse."

He jumped down, upsetting the bier, a vehicle not designed for the use of active passengers. When it was on its four wheels again he helped Beth on to it and she took her turn at peering through the window.

"Good gracious!" she said. "It's Uncle Timothy."

"There's a Lisping for that Lilith of yours for next week," he said. "The floor of a parish church dug up by pious vicar! Such a thing has never been heard of before."

"Jimmy," she whispered, "do you think---- I've heard that the clergy are often buried in the chancels of churches, and he does have a trying time sometimes with Aunt Agatha? Do you think he can be digging his own grave? Oh!"

The exclamation was forced from her by the fact that the vicar, startled by some sound, suddenly stood upright and stared at her. Beth's nerves had already been shaken by the noises and the falling stones in the cave. It was small wonder that the sudden rising of her uncle from what looked like a grave startled her afresh.

The vicar was nearly as frightened as she was. A face appearing at a church window high up in the walls of a chancel is scarcely likely to belong to a human being. In all probability it is an angel, and though we respect angels and like to sing hymns about them we do not want to come into personal contact with one. Their portraits are all very well and can be comfortably admired when painted on the glass of church windows. The actual face pressed against the glass outside is not such a pleasant thing to see.

Mr. Eames recovered his self-possession before Beth regained hers. He recognised his niece, and having recognised her was embarrassed rather than frightened.

"My dear Beth," he shouted, for it is necessary to shout if conversation is to be carried on through a stained glass window. "I didn't expect to meet you here, but I'm very glad, very glad indeed to see you. I'll come out to you and then we can both go down to the vicarage for tea. You're sure to want tea. I know I do. To tell you the truth I forgot to bring up any sandwiches to-day, so I've had no lunch."

He rubbed a little of the clay off his hands, laid the floor boards of the pew over the hole and replaced the carpet. Then he unlocked the south door of the church and greeted Beth. She introduced Jimmy. The Vicar looked first at one and then at the other with a whimsical little smile.

"You young people have caught me," he said. "But I hope----it's rather a humiliating request to make but I hope that you won't find it necessary to tell anyone what I was doing."

"As if we would, Uncle Timothy," said Beth. "Especially Aunt Agatha."

"Yes, yes, especially your aunt. Of course I'm going to tell her all about it in the end. But the fact is---- You know, my dear Beth, how your aunt is always telling me that I ought to do something for the parish."

"Poor Uncle Timothy!" said Beth.

"She's quite right," said Mr. Eames mildly. "I've always admitted that she's quite right. A man ought not to live without doing something."

"That's exactly what Beth says to me," said Jimmy, "and she's quite right, too."

"My difficulty," said Mr. Eames, "was to discover something which I could do, and at the same time something that would please your aunt. Now I think I've found the exact thing."

"Uncle Timothy," said Beth, "I don't believe Aunt Agatha is as bad as that. I know she's really fond of you. She won't be pleased. She really won't. She'll be very sorry, heartbroken, when you tell her that you've dug your grave."

"My grave! My dear Beth! Dug my grave! But I haven't. Nothing of the sort."

"Then what on earth were you digging?" said Beth.

"That," said the vicar, "is quite a long story."

It was; but he told it. Sitting on a flat tombstone with Beth on the grass at his feet, and Jimmy, fairly comfortable, full

stretch on the bier.

Years before, soon after coming to Hailey Compton, the vicar had heard that there was some connection between the church and the cave. A legend existed, repeated without conviction by the old people in the parish, that the smugglers, in the irreverent days of the eighteenth century, used to store their goods in the church itself. But such stories are common all over England. There is scarcely an ancient church but rumour speaks of a covered way between it and a cave or the ruins of a monastery or a house which occupies the site of what was once a baron's castle. There is at least one church which tradition insists on connecting with a neighbouring public-house. If that passage could be found--and traces of it were discovered lately by men engaged in making a drain--it might be used as an argument by temperance reformers to demonstrate that an immoral alliance has always existed between the church and the brewery. Or by the advocates of more and better beer, to prove that the church, in the days when its faith was still undefiled by Henry VIII and Elizabeth, was not hostile to the natural joys of life. Such is the peculiar value of arguments based on historical and archaeological research. They can be used with equal force on either side in any modern dispute.

Mr. Eames, knowing the untrustworthy nature of local legends, paid no particular attention to that which connected his church with the smugglers' cave, and might never have investigated the matter if he had not been troubled by a loose board in the floor of the pew to which he had retired to read Epictetus. Day after day this board wobbled and shook under the leg of his chair when he sat down. He remembered the same thing happening when he had retired to the church for a few days during the starting of his wife's plays. Then, since he did not stay long, the thing had not mattered much. On the occasion of the pageant it became a serious annoyance. It was no use moving the chair, for wherever he put it one of its legs stood on a loose board. It appeared that nearly all the boards in the floor of that pew were loose.

Goaded to exasperation he at last took up the well worn and exceedingly dirty carpet to find out what was the matter with the boards. He discovered to his amazement that they were not only loose but movable, and evidently intended to be movable. One of them had a brass ring, by which it could without difficulty be lifted out of its place. Once it was lifted those on each side could be moved too. Mr. Eames, mildly excited, uncovered a square hole into which it was possible to step.

The legend of the existence of a passage connecting the church with the cave came back to his mind. There must, he thought, be some truth in it, for he had lit on what looked like the end of a passage leading from the church to somewhere, perhaps into the cave. With the aid of an ordnance survey map and some measurements which he took, he reached the conclusion that the end of the cave must be directly under the church. He discovered the chimney in the cave's roof which had excited Beth and Jimmy when they found it. It seemed perfectly plain that the hole inside the church and the chimney in the cave were part of one passage. Unfortunately the hole was filled with stones and loose earth. In order to establish the connection, Mr. Eames had to do some excavating. He brought up the spade from the vicarage and afterwards the pickaxe which Mrs. Eames missed and supposed to be lost or stolen. Coming on a large block of stone, one of the main causes of the obstruction, he found that he could not move it with his hands. He went very early in the morning and took young Bunce's tackle from the mouth of the cave. After the removal of that stone he got on rapidly and had almost completed the clearance when Beth and Jimmy visited the cave.

"I have great hopes," he said simply, "that your aunt will be pleased when I show her the hole leading straight down into the cave."

"I'm sure she will," said Beth.

"And she'll never be able to say again that I do nothing for the parish. A discovery like that ought to be quite useful for any parish. Don't you think so?"

"It will make Hailey Compton famous," said Beth, "and Aunt Agatha will be able to get up another pageant to show it off."

Jimmy seemed uninterested in the ultimate value of the hole to the modern parish. He wanted to understand what it was like and how it was originally used.

"Are there any remains of steps?" he asked.

"Oh no," said Mr. Eames, "it's just a hole. In fact I shall have to be very careful not to fall through when I'm finishing off the digging."

"I didn't see any sign of steps at the lower opening," said Jimmy.

"They may have used ladders," said Beth.

"My idea," said the vicar, "is that the men didn't go up and down at all. The passage was only used for hoisting things from the cave into the church. It's just a straight drop like a well, and anything could be pulled up."

"Anyhow," said Jimmy, "it's a most interesting thing and everybody ought to be most grateful to you for finding it."

"You really think so," said the vicar with an anxious little smile. "I should be very happy if I thought my wife would take that view of it."

"Oh, she's sure to," said Beth.

"But don't tell her about it until it's quite finished. It would be so much better if it comes to her as a surprise."

"I won't open my lips," said Beth, "and you can count on Jimmy. He's most reliable."

"And do you really think," said the vicar, appealing to Jimmy, "that I have succeeded at last in doing something for the parish?"

"I can only say, sir," said Jimmy, rising from the bier, "that I wish I'd half your luck. I came up to your church this evening hoping to find something really useful to do, something which would redeem my life from mere fatuity----"

"Oh, do shut up, Jimmy," said Beth. "I never said that."

"Not in those words," said Jimmy, "not in nearly such nice words, though you are an author. But it's exactly what you meant. And now I find----" he turned to the vicar, "that you've been beforehand with me. I congratulate you."

The vicar seemed puzzled. He looked inquiringly at Beth out of his colourless, watery eyes, while Jimmy shook his limp and earthy hand with painful heartiness.

Chapter XVI

Of the actual performance of the Hailey Compton pageant it is surely unnecessary to give any account here. Every newspaper in England devoted columns to the description of the brilliant scene. It is impossible for anyone to have escaped reading something about it and, knowing that it was an immense success, perhaps the most popular show since the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The least observant among us can scarcely have helped looking at the picture of the last Prime Minister, in a silk hat and frock coat, shaking hands with Lord Colavon, the helmsman of the lugger, who was attired, in spite of Sir Evelyn's antiquarian scruples, in white flannels and a yachting cap. Quite as widely reproduced was the photograph of the bishop patting the head of one of the pack horses, while the two girls responsible for it stood beside him with chaste smiles, as if they expected to have their heads patted when the bishop had done with the horse; which indeed happened to both of them, though the photographs of that patting were not published.

The day of the performance was singularly fine, which was pure luck, but helped greatly towards its success. Had it been raining or even drizzling the great scene would almost certainly have been a failure. The flare on the church tower might have smoked instead of blazing. The signal lamps on the lugger out at sea would have been invisible on shore. But it was not luck, it was skill, which chose the exact moment for the arrival of the lugger. An hour earlier, when the glow of the setting sun was still strong, the blaze on the tower would have been unimpressive, and the flashing lights at sea would have escaped notice altogether. An hour or two hours later, when the twilight had died away, it would have been impossible for the spectators to see what happened when the lugger reached the cave. But Mrs. Eames--Sir Evelyn got the credit in the newspapers but Mrs. Eames deserved it--chose what Beth in a description of the performance called the psychological moment. It was just dark enough for the signal lights to make a good display, and there was still light enough to allow the operations of landing the cargo to be observed.

It was skill and not luck which selected the day for the performance, and here the credit belongs almost entirely to Lord Colavon. He discovered a day--perhaps the only day during the whole of that summer--when there was nothing else of great importance going on. Ascot was over. The Wimbledon Tennis Tournament had not yet begun. There was a pause between the first and second Test Matches. Yachts had not yet begun to race in popular waters. Interest in the regatta at Henley had died away. The fashionable world and that greater public which amuses itself in fashionable ways had nowhere particular to go on that particular day; no engagements and nothing fresh to talk about. The Hailey Compton Pageant filled a gap.

It had been very well advertised, again a matter of skill, though mingled with luck. It was Beth Appleby who deserved praise for the advertising. She did not, indeed--no single person could--write all the preparatory notes and articles which appeared for weeks beforehand. She did not supply the papers with all the photographs they published. Other journalists, discovering and developing the popularity of the pageant, earned their guineas. But it was Beth who did the spade work and forced the pageant on the attention of editors who might otherwise not have noticed it. Her character sketch of James Hinton--"Valet and Artist"--attracted attention in a popular Sunday paper. A study of Mrs. Eames as an enthusiastic and successful reviver of the best features of mediaeval village life, with its apt quotations from Blake's poems--"Dark, satanic mills" and "England's green and pleasant land"--won the sympathy and support of the intellectual neo-Catholics, a school of writers who still possess a great, though diminishing influence among the members of suburban literary societies. Her intimate account of Sir Evelyn's home life--"Studious research and patient pursuits of original sources"--was read, or at all events talked of, all over Oxford. It was she who circulated the first published photograph of the cave, several "camera portraits" of old Bunce, of the mentally deficient Whittle, and of Lord Colavon seated at the steering wheel of the Pallas Athene. Her success stimulated other photographers, and the press was flooded, though by no means sated, with snapshots of every person and place connected with the pageant. There was even, in one paper, a picture of Mr. Linker, standing, with a smile on his face, in front of the door of his shop in Morriton St. James.

The results of all this care, thought and skill, were obvious early on the afternoon of the great day. People had talked to each other about Hailey Compton and wondered where it was. Newspapers found themselves obliged to publish road maps, often very inaccurate, to satisfy this desire for information. Motor-cars of every size and make converged on the stretch of down land above the cliffs, followed each other in a long procession along the road, and plunged, one after another, down the twisting lane. There were no accidents, because it was impossible for any car to break free from control and rush down the hill. When any brakes failed or any driver lost his nerve, his car merely bumped gently into the one in front. There was not room for it to gather dangerous speed before the collision and to produce disaster it would have had to push, not one or two but at least a hundred cars in front of it, a thing impossible for any single car

to do.

A little more than half-way down the hill Mr. Linker had established a kind of toll-gate through which no car was allowed to pass without the payment of a fee. Some people resented this interference with the freedom of the King's highway, but their protests were futile. They never had time to say much or express their feelings fully, for the pressure of the cars behind drove theirs forward while they were still arguing about their rights. The takings at this toll-gate were enormous.

The catering for the multitude--preliminary afternoon tea and cold supper afterwards--was managed by James Hinton. There was, late in the evening, a shortage of ham, tongue and lamb, for the numbers exceeded all expectation. But the cold beef held out until the end and there was no failure of salad.

For Mrs. Eames the day was one of unmixed and rapturous delight. Every single part of the performance went without a hitch, exactly as she had planned it. Even the mermaid dance--Mary Lambert and twenty village girls along the margin of the sea--was successful, a surprising thing and highly creditable to every one concerned in it, for it was very difficult to dance gracefully over large, round stones.

Sir Evelyn was well pleased with himself and everyone else. His introductory speech, those few words, without which no function of any sort can get started, were taken down by eager reporters, and cheered by all who could hear them and many who could not. He had on one side of him the Chief of his Party, who shook hands with him in warm congratulation when the performance was over, and on the other side, the bishop, who graciously expressed a wish that the whole thing might be done again in the grounds of his palace, fifty miles inland, for the benefit of the cathedral funds. Other eminent men and women who clustered behind him, were fluent in their compliments, which was easy for them, because each one had come with a neat little speech prepared, in case, as each one hoped, such a thing should be required.

Sir Evelyn felt that he was once more in his proper place, almost as prominent as he had been and hoped to be again when his Party was in power and he was a Cabinet Minister. But though pleased and satisfied, Sir Evelyn was exceedingly tired when the affair was over. His labours had begun long before he arrived at Hailey Compton for the performance, and continued for two whole days after the pageant was over. He entertained for the occasion all the more eminent patrons of the pageant, and they made a difficult party to manage. The bishop was as suave and smiling as a Christian prelate ought to be, and he got on very well with the young actress who talked with him in the latest slang. But he did not get on equally well with the titled doctor who happened to be an anti-Christian by temperament, and wanted to repeat all the witticisms he had ever heard about the Church when he found himself, a little unexpectedly, in distinguished company. There were moments of anxiety when the judge, who was strongly prejudiced against all doctors, insisted on saying what he thought about expert medical witnesses, and the evidence they gave. Beth Appleby and Mary Lambert would, perhaps, have been no great help to Sir Evelyn even if they had been still at the Manor House. They had both gone to the vicarage at Hailey Compton before the important guests arrived. Mary had to be on the spot for rehearsals of the mermaid dance. Beth found it desirable to be at the centre of activity. Both knew that there would be no room for them at the Manor House and had enough tact and good sense to go away, though Sir Evelyn invited them to stay on. Jimmy was with him still, and was really helpful. Having the sort of temperament which is unaffected by the pomposities and vanities of elderly and successful men, he remained infectiously cheerful and often saved an awkward situation by making jokes so silly that everybody, except the actress, united to snub him and felt quite friendly with each other when they had succeeded. But even Jimmy added a little to his uncle's difficulties with the party. He took the ex-Prime Minister out for a drive in the restored Pallas Athene and frightened him so much that for a whole day afterwards he was querulous and captious, the result of a severe nervous shock.

Thus it was that when the pageant was over, and two days later the last eminent guest had gone, Sir Evelyn was thoroughly tired, and glad to sit down quietly in his study. He felt a great yearning for silence and solitude. His surroundings promised him just what he wanted.

The sun shone in pleasantly through a large south window and the glare, which is the great fault of shining summer suns, was reduced by the leaves of a virginia creeper which clustered on the wall round the casement. Outside, a breeze made a gentle rustling through the branches of a glowing copper beech. The long herbaceous border was ablaze with colour, the brilliant blue of anchusas, the mauves and pinks of tall foxgloves, the white of a ribbon of low pinks, the subdued blue of violas, and the rich reds of many sweet-williams. Sir Evelyn, looking out, enjoyed a sense of mild relief--mild because he was too tired to feel anything strongly, even the delight of sunshine and the colours of the flowers.

Inside, the room was cool and staid. Gentle shadows, like the caresses of middle-aged lovers, hung over the bookshelves and the pictures on the wall. There stood, in orderly rows, all Sir Evelyn's favourite books; old memoirs bound in faded calf, tall folios rich in illustrations, rebound in purple leather and adorned with gilt impressions of the Dent coat of arms, portfolios of ancient charts, squat vellum-coloured accounts of early voyages. The pictures were

those which Sir Evelyn chiefly delighted in, sea pieces, where old-fashioned ships lay in harbour with high-peaked bowsprits, tall poops and hanging sails; or plunged through crested seas while windy clouds raced across the sky.

Sir Evelyn, stretched in a deep chair, looked round at the books and pictures with mild pleasure. His was the delightful ease which follows a time of weariness. And that weariness in his case had been the result of hard work well done, toil brought to a successful end. Ease without the congratulations of a satisfied conscience loses half its delight. Sir Evelyn's conscience was in alliance with his surroundings to give him the full joy of peace. His work was done, well done, praised by all men and need never be done again. Is any state achieved by man on earth more delightful than that?

On the table beside his chair stood piles of press cuttings, four large piles. They had been taken from their green wrappers and neatly arranged by a careful servant. Sir Evelyn had not, while his guests remained with him, had time to read the accounts of the pageant; but when the judge, latest lingering of his guests, had gone, he looked forward to the pleasure of studying all the papers had to say about him. Never, even when he was Cabinet Minister, had his piles of cuttings been quite so high. But Sir Evelyn waited, like an epicure who hesitates before putting the delicious morsel into his mouth, hoping to double the pleasure by adding expectation to realisation.

While he lingered, satisfied with stillness and silence, tenderly savouring the pleasure to come, his chance of ever enjoying it was snapped from him. A servant entered the room.

"A gentleman has called who wishes to see you, sir."

"I won't see anyone to-day," said Sir Evelyn.

He had seen and talked to gentlemen of every sort and description every day and at all hours for a week. He had been photographed, interviewed, invited and pressed to do fifty troublesome things. He was determined to have no more gentlemen let loose at him.

"He's a Mr. East, sir," said the servant, "and he says his business is most important."

"Mr. East!"

Sir Evelyn was dimly aware of having heard the name before, but couldn't remember when or where.

"He asked me to mention that he is connected with the Board of Inland Revenue, sir."

"What on earth can he want with me? The entertainment tax is paid. At least I think we paid the entertainment tax. Mr. Linker undertook to look after that."

"The gentleman says his business is very urgent, sir."

"I suppose I'd better see him, though it's a nuisance. Show him in here."

Mr. East was shown in, a lean little man with a ragged brown beard. He introduced himself as a supervisor of Customs and Excise for the district. He was so nervous that his hands shook and his voice quavered.

"If there's been any misunderstanding about the entertainment tax," said Sir Evelyn, "I wish you'd see Mr. Linker about it. His shop is in High Street, and at this time of day you're sure to find him there."

Mr. East, fidgeting uncomfortably, said that the entertainment tax had been paid and that no question about it had been raised or was likely to be raised by the Inland Revenue authorities, "but----" he stuttered, and then hesitated.

The man's nervous fidgetiness exasperated Sir Evelyn, who could imagine no reason why he did not go straight to his business, whatever it was. Yet certain excuses might have been made for Mr. East. He was a minor officer in a branch of the Civil Service. Nurtured in the tradition of that great service he regarded the Parliamentary Heads of Departments as men who should be treated as the heathen, and some others, treat their gods, with reverential respect and humble worship; although--the example of the heathen and others may be cited again--their commands and expressed opinions may be and should be regarded as unimportant and generally foolish. Sir Evelyn was, or had been, such a god. Mr. East was an orthodox worshipper. It is natural for pious men to be nervous and fidgety in the presence of gods.

And Mr. East was a man who had achieved a certain amount of what is called education by means of County Council scholarships and had successfully passed the examination which admitted him to the Civil Service. He was therefore inclined to dislike and despise those for whom the winning of scholarships in early life had not been necessary and who, in spite of their expensive education could not at any time have passed a Civil Service examination. By temperament, position and achievement he was one of those Englishmen who have a thorough contempt for our aristocracy, the class to which Sir Evelyn unquestionably belonged. No one is more nervous than your thoroughgoing

democrat who is determined not to be uncomfortable in the company of men like Sir Evelyn.

But there was yet another reason to account for the perspiration which was standing on Mr. East's forehead. Imagine a worshipper forced to accuse the god above his altar of a base fraud, or an independent member of the middle class who finds himself compelled to make a charge of a dishonourable kind against a man whose name, borne by a long list of ancestors, is written like an endorsement across page after page of English history.

That was the unfortunate position of Mr. East.

He had that morning received from London by registered post from the permanent head of his department, instructions to visit Sir Evelyn, to see him personally, to inform him that His Majesty's Department of Customs and Excise was fully aware that smuggling on a large scale had been carried on under cover of the Hailey Compton pageant.

Mr. East had gasped when he read that letter. It gave details, so many gallons of French brandy and wine, a very large quantity. So many hundred yards of silk, the real product of the industry of the foreign worm. The fraud was as shameless as it was immense; and there was no doubt whatever about the facts. Mr. East, who knew his business and the ways of his department, understood exactly how this information had been received and how it came that the department was so sure of its facts. Notice is always sent by agents, whose business it is to watch such things, of any considerable shipment of contraband goods from a Continental port. The ship which carries them is known. The men to whom they are consigned in England are marked.

All this Mr. East had to tell, and in the end did tell to Sir Evelyn. He was nervous and miserable, but he was a man possessed by that spirit which forces the best of us to do desperately unpleasant duties. He did his.

Sir Evelyn's conscience was perfectly clear. He was annoyed that such an absurd and tiresome mistake should have been made; but he had not the slightest doubt that it was a mistake. He said so with the confidence of an accused man who knows that he is innocent.

Mr. East, more nervous than ever, but still determined to do his duty, went on:

"I'm instructed to say, sir, that the department is unwilling to allow the law to take its course in the case of a man----" Here he corrected himself and said "gentleman, in your position. If you will make a frank statement of the amount of contraband goods imported, and will at once pay the full duty applicable to such goods no further proceedings will be taken. You will understand, sir"--Mr. East nearly choked while saying this--"that this leniency is only extended to you in order to avoid what might well be a most disagreeable scandal."

Here, it is regrettable to have to relate it, Sir Evelyn lost his temper. Being perfectly innocent of any attempt to defraud, or intention of making an attempt to defraud anyone, he was very naturally indignant. He suggested in tones of icy dignity that Mr. East should leave the room and communicate with him further--if further communication was necessary--through a firm of solicitors.

"I am also instructed, sir," said Mr. East, "to say that no steps will be taken before to-morrow morning. The department, though unable to condone or overlook the fraud, is willing to give you time to consider their proposal and your position."

This was more than Sir Evelyn could stand. He stood up and rang the bell.

"I shall direct my servant," he said, "to show you out and not to admit you into my house again."

Mr. East, by this time sweating at every pore and tingling with acute discomfort, bowed and turned towards the door.

"I ought to add," he said as he went out, "that no attempt to remove the dutiable goods from the cave in which we believe them to be stored will be permitted. To-morrow at noon, unless you have complied with the terms of the department's proposal, our officers will enter the cave and seize the goods."

"Your officers," said Sir Evelyn, goaded to extreme exasperation, "may search the cave as much as they damned well choose. They'll find nothing there."

Chapter XVII

The departure of the last guest from the Manor House was almost as great a relief to Lord Colavon as to Sir Evelyn. It was he who drove the judge and his suit case to the railway station in Morriton St. James. Having handed over the case to the porter and waved farewell to the judge he felt that duty had no further claim upon him. He swept the car round, picked his way through the narrow streets of the town and set out upon the road which led to Hailey Compton. There he indulged in a joyous burst of speed. The Pallas Athene, restored by the new parts sent from London, responded and showed herself to be the sort of car he hoped and supposed when he bought her.

The twenty miles to the top of the cliff were covered in less than half an hour, and when Jimmy changed gear for the descent into the village he felt well satisfied. He had reason to be. The weather which had pleased Sir Evelyn, resting in his study, delighted Jimmy who had the sparkling sea in front of him. Beth was at the vicarage and he was on his way to see her. He had stored safely in the cave six dozen pairs of silk stockings. He looked forward to seeing the pleasure of the two girls when he made his present to them. There were also in the cave a number of cases of brandy, some hundreds of bottles of champagne and a quantity of other wine, the property of James Hinton. There were some large bales of silk which belonged to Mr. Linker. Jimmy was not concerned about these. He had helped to land them and helped to store them, without, as he believed, attracting any attention or giving rise to any questions or inquiries. The business had been carried through with the greatest ease and Jimmy's part of it was over. The removal and final disposal of the goods was the affair of the owners. All Jimmy had to do was to pick up his own parcel, tuck it under his arm and walk out of the cave with it.

The car drew up at the vicarage door and Jimmy was greeted by the two girls with shouts of welcome.

"We're just starting off to bathe," said Mary.

"You'll come too, of course," said Beth. "If you haven't got a bathing dress you must borrow Uncle Timothy's. I've never known him bathe, but he's sure to have one somewhere."

Mrs. Eames, laden with towels, appeared and greeted Jimmy.

"This is just splendid," she said. "We'll all go and bathe together. Such a day! The first really hot day this summer. The pool at the mouth of the cave will be glorious. And then you'll come back and lunch with us. Now don't interrupt me, Beth." Beth was trying to speak. "I know there's nothing to eat, literally nothing. Two great hungry girls, Lord Colavon. You can't imagine what a lot of food they get through. But we'll send Gladys out to borrow what she can. Her aunt may have some bacon. Anyway we can get some bread and cheese. I'm sure you won't mind, Lord Colavon. Beth is trying to say that you will, but you won't."

"I wasn't trying to say any such thing," said Beth. "I was trying to say that Jimmy hasn't got a bathing dress."

"Would Timothy's fit you? He has one, I know, for I bought it for him last summer. But he's never worn it, not once. Such a pity. But you know the sort of man your poor, dear uncle is, Beth. He won't enjoy himself. So tiresome of him. I'm just as fond of him as I was the day I married him, but I do wish I could tempt him to do something really wrong. It would be so good for him. Not that bathing is wrong. It isn't. Though I sometimes think that Timothy thinks it is."

After a long search in which both girls joined, the vicar's bathing dress was found, still wrapped in the paper in which it had left Linker's shop in Morriton St. James. The towel offered by Mrs. Eames was not so new. Indeed it was far from being clean. The vicar, apparently, had not thought it wrong to use it.

"How tiresome," said Mrs. Eames, a few minutes later as they crossed the beach. "There's somebody there at the mouth of the cave. A man. I can't think what he's doing there. It doesn't matter really of course. Still, it would have been nicer if we'd had the place to ourselves."

"He looks like a policeman," said Mary.

"He can't be a policeman," said Mrs. Eames. "There aren't any in Hailey Compton. I never saw one here in my life except on the day of the pageant. There were a few then."

"It is a policeman right enough," said Jimmy.

They were near enough to be sure of the uniform. Mrs. Eames was surprised and annoyed.

"Perhaps he'll go away," she said, "when he sees we're going to bathe. I'm not particularly modest and I don't mind any ordinary man watching me. But a policeman is different somehow. I'm sure you'd hate to have a policeman standing about while you undress, wouldn't you, Mary?"

Beth evidently disliked the presence of the policeman quite as much as her aunt did, though not perhaps through feelings of modesty. She caught Jimmy's arm and looked anxiously into his face.

"Let's wave towels and bathing dresses," said Mrs. Eames, "and if that doesn't make him understand that he's not wanted you'll have to ask him to go away, Lord Colavon."

The demonstration with towels and bathing dresses had no effect whatever on the policeman. He stood there, stolid and unmoved, an Englishman at the post of duty, and in all the world there is nothing so immovable as that.

Jimmy, pushed forward by Mrs. Eames, approached the man.

"I wonder," he said, "if you'd mind moving away a little, a few yards along the beach in either direction. The ladies want to bathe in this pool and it's rather awkward if you stand just there. No place to undress, you know."

"Very sorry, sir," said the policeman. "No one is allowed to enter the cave. Orders, sir."

"Orders!" said Jimmy sharply. "Whose orders?"

"Orders of the district superintendent at Morriton St. James, sir."

Jimmy turned away and whistled softly. Mrs. Eames addressed a vigorous protest to the policeman. She said a great deal about the rights of free British citizens to enter caves if they chose. She argued about the unreasonableness of interfering with an innocent pleasure like bathing. She spoke, as she always did, volubly and with energy. The policeman remained entirely indifferent, merely repeating the word "Orders" from time to time when Mrs. Eames paused for breath.

"Jimmy," said Beth, in an anxious whisper, "what's he doing here?"

"It looks to me," said Jimmy, "very much as if somebody had tumbled to the fact that all the cargo we landed the other night wasn't stage property. If so, the fat's in the fire and no mistake."

"But was there anything really smuggled?" said Beth.

There is honour and a sense of comradeship among thieves. Jimmy would not give away the secrets of Hinton and Linker.

"There was that little parcel of silk stockings," he said, "which I promised to get for you and Mary."

"How perfectly sweet of you," said Mary. "I never thought you really meant to."

"I'm beginning to wish I hadn't," said Jimmy. "That policeman----"

"Do you mean to say he'll take the stockings?" said Mary. "How mean!"

"I'm very much afraid he'll do more than that," said Jimmy.

"Jimmy, dearest," said Beth, "do you think he'll put you in prison?"

Mrs. Eames, finding that neither protests nor arguments affected the policeman, ended her harangue with a threat.

"Perhaps you're not aware," she said, "that my husband is the vicar of the parish, the Reverend Timothy Eames. I shall go straight to him now and tell him of your outrageous behaviour. He'll know how to deal with you."

She cannot have believed that; but she spoke with dignity and firmness, as if her husband was a masterful archdeacon and the policeman a naughty choirboy. Perhaps the policeman knew the Reverend Timothy Eames, perhaps he was a believer in the majesty of the law and held that the temporal power is greater than the might of the Church. He was quite unmoved by the threat, and when Mrs. Eames turned her back upon him and walked stiffly away he showed no sign of fear.

Mrs. Eames, very angry indeed, stalked back across the beach. Jimmy and the girls followed her, Mary puzzled, Beth anxious, Jimmy thinking deeply.

"You'd better go to the vicarage with your aunt," he said. "I must trot off and see James Hinton."

"But can't I help you?" said Beth. "I'm rather frightened. I do wish you hadn't done it, Jimmy."

Jimmy refrained from saying he was not the only person who had done it and that things would have been just as bad if there were no silk stockings in the cave for her and Mary.

A fresh surprise, exceedingly alarming and unpleasant, waited for him at the Anchor Inn. On the bench outside were two policemen. They were seated very much at their ease in the pleasant sunshine, and both of them were smoking. It was plain that they were not on duty at the moment. Jimmy's first thought was that Hinton had been already arrested, but the attitude of the policemen reassured him. It is not lolling with a pipe in his mouth that the British constable guards an important prisoner.

Jimmy passed into the inn and found Hinton in the room behind the bar packing a suit-case. He looked white and haggard and was badly frightened. But even with the fear of the vengeance of the law hanging over him his excellent manners did not fail.

"Good morning, my lord. Is there anything I can do for your lordship? I fear the house is rather upset, but--a glass of beer, perhaps? I am thinking of going away for a few days, just packing up, as you see, my lord. But if there's anything I can do to make your lordship comfortable before I go---- It has always been my wish, my lord, to make any gentleman who employs me as comfortable as possible--or his friends, my lord."

The man, apparently, scarcely knew what he was saying. He was frightened out of his senses and was possessed by a desire to get away as quickly as possible.

"You're not arrested, are you, Hinton?"

"Me, my lord! Certainly not. I've always borne a most excellent character. No one has ever had occasion to say anything against me. I'm--I'm going away for a few days, my lord. A little holiday."

"There's a policeman at the mouth of the cave, Hinton, and there are two more outside your door at this moment. What are they doing?"

"I don't know, my lord. I prefer not to inquire; but----" Here Hinton's nerves failed him completely, and he broke down. Even his precise English failed him, and he forgot to say "my lord" at the end of every sentence. "Mr. Linker, he 'phoned through this morning," he whimpered. "He said as how that cave was to be guarded night and day so that nobody could go in or out nor nothing be taken in or out till to-morrow and then the blasted Customs officers is to come and see what's there. They can't arrest me till then. There isn't nothing for them to go on, till they can lay their hands on the goods. That's why I'm off. And Mr. Linker, he's off too. And if you take my advice you'll do a bolt before they nab you. France I'm going to, or maybe Spain. Linker, he's thinking of Russia; says as how the Russian Government won't give him up. But I don't know. I never did trust them Bolshies myself."

It was plain that there was neither counsel of a sensible kind nor any help to be got from James Hinton. The man was the victim of an ague of terror, and could not be trusted to do the simplest thing. Jimmy left the inn, speaking a word of cheerful greeting to the policemen as he passed.

An hour later James Hinton placed his suit-case in the Ford car which had once towed the Pallas Athene into Morriton St. James. He cranked up his engine and went clattering up the village street. The policemen watched him go. Then one of them took possession of the telephone in the inn and rang up the constabulary office in Morriton St. James. No one had authority or power to stop Hinton, but the police felt that it might be convenient to know where he went, in case they wanted to arrest him later on. The progress of the car was reported until it was placed in a garage in Southampton. Hinton's further movements and his embarking on board the steamer for St. Malo were also reported. After that, he was left to the French police to see where he went and what he did.

Mr. Linker, making a break for freedom in another direction, reached Amsterdam and was there marked down by the police. Whether he would ever have got to Russia, or what would have happened to him there if he had, we do not know. It turned out to be unnecessary for him to go beyond Amsterdam. Hinton got no further than an hotel in Parame.

Jimmy went back to the vicarage. He found Beth and Mary anxious and troubled. Mrs. Eames had gone up to the church, where she expected to find her husband. She intended, so Beth said, to induce that unfortunate man to go down to the cave and drive away the policeman, by force if necessary.

"Beth," said Jimmy, "we're in a middling tight place, all of us, especially me. I've told you that I smuggled over a few stockings for you and Mary."

"Surely there won't be a row over a couple of pairs of silk stockings," said Mary. "Nobody could be fool enough to make a fuss about that, not a real fuss."

"As a matter of fact there are six dozen pairs," said Jimmy. "But----"

"How gorgeous!" said Mary. "Three dozen each. Jimmy, we must get them somehow. Suppose I go and make myself perfectly sweet to that policeman. He might be beguiled into letting me----"

"Do shut up, Mary," said Beth anxiously. "This is serious. Go on, Jimmy. What were you going to say?"

"If it was only the stockings I've smuggled," said Jimmy, "there wouldn't be much said about it, but the damned lugger was half full of brandy and wine for Hinton and bales of silk for that sneaking ruffian Linker."

"Will they be arrested?" said Beth. "Don't say they'll be hanged. They don't hang people for smuggling nowadays, do they?"

"They won't be arrested or hanged if I can help it," said Jimmy. "Not that I'd care if they were. I'd be glad. Those two sneaking cowards have bolted, leaving the rest of us to take what's coming, and it'll be mighty unpleasant, unless----"

"Will they put you in prison, Jimmy?" said Mary.

"They may. I don't know, and I don't much care. It won't be for very long, anyhow. What I mind is the infernal mess Uncle Evie will be in, and your aunt, and the bishop, a thoroughly decent old boy that bishop, and all the rest of them. They'll never be able to hold up their heads again. What I mean to say is, it doesn't matter about a fellow like me. But how can Uncle Evie go on being a leading statesman and all that? How can the bishop go on preaching the way bishops do? How can your aunt go on being a vicar's wife, if once it comes out that they've all been deliberately defrauding the revenue on a large scale?"

"Do you mean to say that Aunt Agatha will have to give up being married to Uncle Timothy?" said Beth. "She never will, whatever they say or do to her."

"She'll have to," said Jimmy. "Either that or he'll have to resign the parish, unless we can pull them out of the mess they're in."

"Then let's do it," said Beth. "I'm on for anything to save Aunt Agatha and your old pet of an uncle whom I love. And the bishop. I've always liked bishops, and this one seemed particularly nice. You'll help too, Mary, won't you?"

"Of course I will. I may not be as keen on bishops as you are, Beth, but there are very few things I wouldn't do for the sake of three dozen pairs of silk stockings."

"The first question," said Jimmy, "is, can we persuade your uncle to chip in and stand by us?"

"He'd do anything for Aunt Agatha," said Beth. "He's just as fond of her as she is of him."

"I wonder would he do the sort of thing that some people might call wrong?"

"Of course he would," said Mary. "Anybody would. All really nice and exciting things are wrong, but everybody does them."

Beth was doubtful.

"Uncle Timothy," she said, "isn't like you, Mary, or like most other people. He has a conscience, rather a queer kind of conscience, quite different from Aunt Agatha's, though hers is pretty silly too. The way it takes her is, making her do things, for the parish and all that; whereas it works the other way round with Uncle Timothy, and won't let him do anything hardly. Queer things consciences are, aren't they?"

"Glad I haven't got one," said Mary.

"Well," said Jimmy, "we'll try him. But I tell you plainly that if he won't, we're in an ugly place. Whether he helps or not, we're in an ugly place; but it'll be much uglier if he won't stand in with us. I'm not going to ask him to do much; but I must be able to count on his not giving us away. I think I'd better go up to the church and tackle him."

Chapter XVIII

While he was speaking Mrs. Eames came up the drive holding the vicar's hand. She was trying to walk much more quickly than he wanted to, and it looked as if she was dragging him after her, a prisoner, but apparently not an unwilling one, for his face expressed a kind of puzzled delight.

"Beth," she shouted, "you naughty girl! And you're just as bad, Lord Colavon. Fancy your knowing all about it for days and days and never saying a word to me, either of you."

"I've just been showing her our little discovery," said the vicar in a tone of mild apology. "You remember, Beth, the passage from the church to the cave."

"Aunt Agatha," said Beth, "I want to tell you----"

"You were a wicked girl not to tell me before," said Mrs. Eames. "It's the most exciting thing that's ever happened in Hailey Compton. We'll get down the Royal Society of Antiquaries--I suppose there is a Royal Society of Antiquaries. If there isn't we'll get down the whole British Association, all sorts of learned men from everywhere. You remember the fuss that there was over that skull they dug up somewhere a few years ago. That will be nothing to what this will be. Hailey Compton will be famous all over the world. I always said you ought to do something for the parish, Timothy, and you have at last."

"I'm so glad you're pleased," said the vicar with a wavering little smile.

"Aunt Agatha----" said Beth again.

"Don't interrupt your uncle, Beth, when he's just going to tell us all about his discovery."

"Mrs. Eames," said Lord Colavon, "I really must speak to the vicar for a minute. It's about a serious business and dashed unpleasant."

Even Mrs. Eames was silenced for a moment by the gravity of his tone. When he began to tell the story of the smuggling she grew excited and indignant.

"So that's what James Hinton had in his mind all the time," she said, "and he was only pretending to be interested in the pageant. Guaranteeing fifty pounds! And all the time I thought---- He has----" here she stamped her foot, "he has had the insolence to make a fool of me, he and that nasty Linker, a man I always hated, though I did deal at his shop. But I never will again, or with Hinton. I'll get any beer I want somewhere else, or I'll do without beer altogether. Lord Colavon, do you mind not having any beer for luncheon to-day? Timothy, you must promise me never to have Hinton for your churchwarden again."

"The worst of it is," said Jimmy, "that the Inland Revenue people have found out."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Eames.

"And now," said Jimmy, "I'm very much afraid that there may be arrests."

"The policeman at the mouth of the cave!" said Mrs. Eames. "So that's why he was there. I don't care. I'm glad. Let him arrest James Hinton as soon as he likes. I'd like to see him in prison. After the way he made fools of us all he deserves it."

"Hinton has run away," said Beth, "and the policeman will arrest you."

"That's ridiculous," said Mrs. Eames. "He can't arrest me. I haven't smuggled. They can't touch me, can they, Lord Colavon?"

"I don't think they can arrest you," said Jimmy, "but they may arrest me. And anyhow, there are other things to consider besides arrests. There's your reputation, Mrs. Eames, and Uncle Evie's, and the bishop's, and--well, all the people who've been down here, patrons of the pageant and so forth. When this scandal comes out----"

Even Mrs. Eames, though conscious of complete innocence, saw that a scandal would be most unpleasant for everyone, and very damaging for men like Sir Evelyn and the bishop.

"But Jimmy has a plan," said Beth. "If only Uncle Timothy will agree to it. Jimmy, what is your plan?"

Jimmy explained a simple but promising scheme. The examination of the cave and the seizure of the smuggled goods would not take place until the next day. If, in the meanwhile, all the brandy, wine and silk could be removed from the cave the Customs officers would find no smuggled goods. There would therefore be no evidence that contraband goods had been landed or that any smuggling had actually been done. Whatever suspicions might be entertained there would be no sort of proof.

"But we can't get the things out of the cave with a policeman on guard," said Beth. "Unless---- Oh, Jimmy, the hole from the church into the cave! Could we?"

"We can," said Jimmy, "if the vicar will let us."

"I won't have poor darling Timothy mixed up in it," said Mrs. Eames. "He's never done anything wrong in his life."

"I don't think this is very wrong," said Beth.

"It's helping a fraud," said Mrs. Eames, "and that is wrong. What is it called? Accessory after the fact or something. Anyhow it's wrong and Timothy mustn't do it. They can arrest me if they like and put me in prison, but I won't have Timothy dragged into it."

She put her arm round his neck and stood beside him, her free hand tightly clenched, the fire of defiance in her eyes.

"What do you say yourself, sir?" said Jimmy.

The vicar said nothing for a while. He may have been trying to make up his mind what he ought to say, or it may have been simply that his wife's clasp on his neck was so tight as to make speech impossible.

Jimmy, *advocatus diaboli* in the matter, put the case for wrong-doing as strongly as he could. The reputations of many eminent men were threatened by a scandal from the defilement of which none of them would ever be able to get wholly clear. The good name of the Church was in peril. The prospects of a great party in the State were in jeopardy. Every man, institution or party has enemies. The enemies of religion, atheists and mockers, would fasten on the bishop and through him would injure the Church and Christianity itself. The enemies of the State, socialists and communists, would swarm round Sir Evelyn and work incalculable mischief. The scandal would give them the opportunity they wanted. He pleaded earnestly. Beth backed his appeal; but Mrs. Eames's eyes still flashed righteous indignation and her fist was still tightly clenched.

"Agatha, dear, do let me speak," said the vicar in a hoarse whisper.

Mrs. Eames slightly relaxed her hold on his neck.

"You've often said," the vicar began addressing his wife, "You've often said that I would be a better man if----"

"You couldn't be better, Timothy darling. I've always said that."

"----that I would be a better man if only I would do something wrong."

"Timothy, dearest one, I never said that."

"You did, Aunt Agatha," said Beth. "I've heard you often."

"I rather think I have, too," said Jimmy, "once or twice."

"I should like to be a better man," said the vicar. "I've always wished to be that."

"And you will be," said Jimmy. "If you help us in this you'll be---- By Jove! you'll be the best man I've ever met."

"And it isn't very wrong," said Beth.

"It isn't wrong at all," said Mary eagerly. "When anyone is wicked enough to make a law against silk stockings it isn't wrong to break it, it's right."

"The wronger it is the better man the vicar will be afterwards," said Jimmy. "That's what Mrs. Eames says, and she knows."

"If I ever said any such thing----" said Mrs. Eames.

"You have," said the vicar. "My dear Agatha, you often have."

"I may have," said Mrs. Eames unwillingly. "But if I did, I certainly never meant the sort of wrong thing you could be put in prison for."

"But he won't be," said Jimmy, "or if he is, we'll all be there with him."

"I've always known you were quite right, Agatha, dear," said the vicar plaintively, "and that I ought to do something wrong. My difficulty was to find out something that I could do. I really didn't want to restore a church or write a book about heretics, and nothing else seemed to offer itself. But now--- Lord Colavon, I'm greatly obliged to you, and I regard this as just the opportunity I wanted. Agatha dearest, don't say anything more."

But that was asking too much of Mrs. Eames. She did say a great deal more, though nothing to dissuade the vicar from his determination to pursue the crown of sainthood through the ways of wrong-doing. Having withdrawn her opposition to Jimmy's plan she flung herself eagerly into a discussion of the best ways of carrying it out. There were a great many details to be arranged. Young Bunce's tackle, for instance, which was still in the church, was plainly insufficient for the work of hoisting things out of the cave. The rope was not long enough. As the police were blocking the ordinary entrance to the cave someone would have to be let down to the cave and afterwards hoisted up. Jimmy volunteered for the work but objected to trusting his life to young Bunce's frayed rope. He proposed to buy a new outfit of ropes and blocks, some materials for the erection of a derrick in the church and perhaps a windlass. It was regarded as undesirable to make such purchases in Morriton St. James, where the suspicions of the police might easily be aroused. Here the Pallas Athene proved its value. With such a car it would be possible to rush off to Southampton, thence to Portsmouth, afterwards, if necessary, to Plymouth, places in which such gear might be purchased, a rope here and a block there, without giving rise to inquiries.

There was the question, a much more difficult one, of the disposal of the smuggled goods after they had been lodged in the church.

"They can be piled up in the old pew in the chancel," said Mrs. Eames, "and the curtains drawn. No one ever goes there."

"But they can't always stay there," said the vicar. "I shouldn't like the feeling that the church was full of brandy."

"I don't see how we could possibly take all that stuff away," said Beth, "or where we could put it if we did."

Here Mary made a suggestion, though not a very helpful one.

"I'll carry my stockings away with me," she said, "and I'll take yours, too, if you like, Beth."

"Couldn't we leave it to Hinton and Linker to take away their own things?" said Beth.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Eames vindictively. "It was Hinton and Linker who got us into this trouble, and I'll never agree to their being rewarded for it."

"Besides," said Jimmy, "they've both run away and we can't get at them."

It was, oddly enough, the vicar who hit on the solution of the difficulty.

"This is only Tuesday," he said. "As long as the things are taken out of the church before Sunday it will be all right. Suppose we lower them all down into the cave again on Friday or Saturday. The Customs officers will have given up searching by that time."

"Splendid!" said Beth. "No one ever goes into the cave except you, Aunt Agatha. I should think the brandy and other things might stay there for ever without anybody knowing."

"It does seem a pity about the silk," said Mary. "Such waste."

"And I did hope----" said Mrs. Eames, with a deep sigh.

Everyone understood and sympathised with her. She was called upon to renounce her ambition, to surrender a great hope at the very moment of fruition. The cave had been advertised by the pageant, would be re-advertised by the vicar's discovery. Crowds of people would come to see it. Antiquaries would explore its depths. Picnic parties would shout hilariously to its echoing walls. Just one effort, scarcely an effort, merely the allowing of things to take their course and all this would be realised. Hailey Compton would be famous. Wealth would pour in upon its inhabitants. A great and glorious work for the village would be accomplished. But all this, so it seemed, must be given up. The cave must lapse into a solitude again and the village remain as poor and primitive as it had ever been. It was a bitter disappointment to Mrs. Eames; but she bore it bravely, sustained by the thought that her beloved Timothy was at last doing something, though something in itself undesirable.

For the rest of that morning and all the afternoon the Pallas Athene raced at incredible speeds, east and west on the great main roads of the south of England. Jimmy, at the steering-wheel, broke record after record and rejoiced. Beth, beside him, glowed with a satisfaction not unlike her aunt's. Like the Reverend Timothy Eames, Jimmy, her lover, was proving himself a worthy man, actually doing something of real usefulness. He was breaking laws with reckless daring all day long in order to be able to break other laws all night. But--Beth thrilled with the thought, he was saving the honour of men and women, the good name of the church, the constitution of the State, the majesty of the Empire.

At ten o'clock that night, Jimmy, seated in the loop of a carefully tied knot, was lowered slowly, turning giddily round, from the squire's pew in Hailey Compton church into the profound darkness of the cave below. Clinging tightly to the rope, paying it out inch by inch were Mrs. Eames, Mary Lambert, Beth Appleby and the vicar. Their muscles were tense, their faces set with anxious determination. A distant sound of rolling stones and a sharp twitching of the rope told them that the ordeal was safely over. The rope was hauled up again and Beth, with white face and clenched teeth, took her seat in the loop. She grasped the rope above her firmly. The descent began. She bumped against the sides of the hole and was bruised. She grew giddy as the rope swung round and round. But her courage held. She was received at last in Jimmy's arms.

Then began for the whole party a night of desperate toil. Jimmy and Beth, sweating and half smothered in the close air of the cave, dragged the bales and cases to the gaping hole. Their fingers bled where the skin was rubbed off them. Their nails were broken. Their muscles were strained to utter weariness. Far above them, the vicar, Mrs. Eames and Mary hauled at the rope. The slowly raised weights seemed to grow heavier and heavier. They moved uneasily in a space which became gradually narrowed and less sufficient as bales and cases were piled up in the square pew. How fortunate that the eighteenth century lord of the manor, who designed and built the pew, should have liked ample space for his devotions! He planned largely, a room rather than a pew, intending perhaps to use the place not only for worship but for just such purposes as it was used for that night.

All night long--such are the curious inequalities of the human lot--a policeman stood at the mouth of the cave. While others toiled, he wearied of utter idleness. While others gasped for air, the sea breeze blew round him. While others sweated, he stamped his feet and swung his arms to keep himself warm. In the new society of which we dream, for which we strive, things must be better ordered. No longer must our souls be vexed by the contrast between excessive toil and listless idleness.

Yet--and here again we have an instance of the oddness of human affairs--the leisured policeman, yawning and stretching himself, missed something which came to the perspiring toilers in the cave--a thrill, a joy, a rapture which more than compensated for bleeding knuckles, broken nails and aching limbs.

The last case was secured in its sling and ascended slowly into the darkness. The work of the night was finished. In a few minutes Beth would be following the case, seated in the loop, clinging to the rope. Then Jimmy would follow her, and after that--- He hoped that Mrs. Eames had some beer in the vicarage. He believed she had. He thought she must have. No woman would be so foolish as to forget to have beer ready at the end of such a night. Beer! Not since the day when Sir Evelyn first drove down the hill into Hailey Compton had any man wanted beer so much as Jimmy wanted it then.

But Beth, it seemed, was not thinking of beer, or even of tea, which for some women takes the place of beer.

"Jimmy," she said softly, "do you remember the last time we were here?"

"Of course I do. A smuggler's ghost threw stones at us."

"And I said----"

Beth paused for a while. Then the darkness, a wonderful solvent of maiden modesty, helped her to go on again.

"I think I said---- I mean, after you said---- You remember what you said----"

"I said what I've been saying for the last two years," said Jimmy. "And what you said was 'No.'"

"But I told you why," said Beth.

"You've always been telling me why."

"Jimmy," she burst out, "are you going to make me propose to you? Don't you see, you silly old dear, that that isn't a why any longer? You've been perfectly splendid to-night. You've thought of things and done things--and---- Oh, Jimmy, only for you where would everybody be to-morrow when the horrid Customs officers come to search the cave?"

Then, though very thirsty, Jimmy forgot about the beer. Ben Jonson, a dramatist and a poet who knew something about

human nature and could express himself very prettily, says that kisses are to be preferred sometimes "even to Jove's nectar." Jimmy, tired, sore and grimy, in a stuffy cave, at the horrible hour of 4 a.m., found them more to be desired than much beer.

Chapter XIX

A good conscience is a priceless possession. Sir Evelyn had not broken the laws of his country by bringing into it forbidden things. With all his admiration for the smugglers of the eighteenth century, whose lives he studied, it would have been impossible for him to imitate them. Nor would he willingly have associated with a man who smuggled anything more than a box of cigars after a trip to the Channel Islands. The accusation of the egregious Mr. East left Sir Evelyn untroubled. Some incredibly absurd mistake had been made for which in due time an apology would be forthcoming. It was impossible that a pageant, in itself a highly commendable thing--a pageant under the patronage of a bishop, of a judge, of a man who had been Prime Minister, of Sir Evelyn Dent--should have been in reality a smuggling raid. Was he to suspect Mrs. Eames, a transparently honest though too talkative lady, of being a smuggler? And she had managed the whole affair from the beginning. Could he think that James Hinton, the very type of superior upper servant, that Linker, a most respectable shopkeeper with a taste for politics, had deliberately planned a disgraceful fraud? The idea was preposterous. And had not his own nephew, Lord Colavon, to whom the petty gains of illicit trading could be no temptation--had he not been in command of--had he not actually steered the lugger?

Someone in a Government office in London had blundered badly, and the ridiculous, tremulous Mr. East with his ultimatum and his threats could be forgotten as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, Sir Evelyn could not quite forget Mr. East, and after a while he rose and rang the bell.

"If Lord Colavon is anywhere about the place," he said, "ask him to be so good as to come and speak to me here for a few minutes."

A servant searched for Lord Colavon in the house. A gardener sought him in the grounds. A man who cleaned the boots and carried coal reported that the Pallas Athene was not in the garage. It was surmised that Lord Colavon had not yet returned from the railway station to which he had conveyed the judge.

"Very well," said Sir Evelyn, "as soon as he does return ask him to come here."

The morning passed, not unpleasantly for Sir Evelyn, who found much to interest him in the press-cuttings. Luncheon-time came and he ate it alone. Lord Colavon had not yet returned and the Pallas Athene was not yet in the garage. The servant, surmising again, suggested that his lordship might have gone to Hailey Compton to visit the young ladies. Sir Evelyn thought this very likely, and ate his luncheon peacefully. Tea-time came, and after that dinner, but Lord Colavon did not appear. Sir Evelyn was slightly annoyed but not much surprised. His nephew was a young man of irregular habits.

The servant, bringing whisky and a siphon into the study at half-past nine, ventured on a further guess.

"His lordship's car may have broken down somewhere."

This, too, seemed probable.

"Very unreliable, these high-powered cars," said the servant. "So I've always been led to believe."

"Don't sit up for him," said Sir Evelyn. "He's not likely to return to-night. I shall go to bed as usual."

He did, at the sober hour of eleven o'clock. He was by that time seriously annoyed and a little uneasy--not because he feared that any harm had come to his nephew. Whatever might have happened to the car, Jimmy himself was sure to be safe. Accidents do not happen to that kind of young man, though they ought to. Yet, Sir Evelyn reflected, it would have been satisfactory to have heard him deny--- No. It would be ridiculous to expect a formal denial of Mr. East's accusation. It would have been satisfactory to have laughed over the matter with his nephew. To make jokes about it and hear jokes made before going to bed. Yet, in spite of annoyance, Sir Evelyn slept quietly that night.

Next morning at eight o'clock he was called and his letters laid beside him. Sir Evelyn glanced at them as he poured out his tea. There was a thick bundle of press-cuttings, more comments on the pageant. There were several circulars. There were one or two bills. There was just one envelope which looked as if it contained a letter. It came from a very important political personage, one of those gentlemen whose names do not appear prominently in the newspapers, who seldom make speeches on full-dress occasions, but are powerful in the councils of parties and have a great deal to do with the administration of funds.

Sir Evelyn opened the envelope with a vague feeling of uneasiness. The premonition was justified at once. The letter

was startling and disquieting.

You've no doubt heard the gossip which has been flying round the clubs for the last two days. I heard it yesterday and regarded it as nothing but an unusually wild canard. This morning I was forced to change my opinion. The Inland Revenue people have, or believe they have, information which points to the fact that smuggling on a large scale was successfully carried out at that pageant of yours. By the way, I congratulate you on the success of the affair. I couldn't manage to get down to it, but I hear it was brilliant. I need not say that I do not for a moment suspect you of trying to defraud the revenue. The suggestion is absurd. But could anything of the sort have been going on without your knowing it? That seems difficult to believe; but the Inland Revenue people are very confident. They say—I have this in strict confidence—that they know where the smuggled goods are hidden and can put their hands on them whenever they like. I need scarcely remind you that the consequences of an expose of this kind would be serious. No sane person would believe that you and the Chief had combined together to smuggle brandy into the country. But you know the sort of mud that is slung at Election times—we may be in for one any day now—and how much of it sticks no matter how carefully we wash each other's faces. If you can give a perfectly clear and unqualified denial to the rumour, or accusation, for it comes to that, please telegraph to me and I'll see that it gets proper publicity. It won't be the first time that these permanent officials have turned out to be too clever. But if by any chance they can prove their case—not against you, but against anyone connected with your pageant—that is to say, if they can put their hands on a case of brandy or a dozen of champagne, then for heaven's sake pacify them in some way. They're going to give you the chance, I understand. Pay up. Apologise. Do anything you can; but do not let us have any publicity. I need scarcely say that I shall pull every string I can to keep the matter out of the courts, and I'll threaten any of the papers that have been hinting at it, but I must know definitely how things stand.

Sir Evelyn, without waiting to drink his cup of tea, rose and rang the bell.

"Is Lord Colavon in the house?"

"His lordship," said the servant, "is at present in bed. I understand that he returned about six o'clock this morning. The under housemaid who was sweeping the hall at the time informed me that his lordship----"

"Send him to me at once," said Sir Evelyn.

"Very good, sir."

But he did not do so. He returned five minutes later to say that he found it quite impossible to waken Lord Colavon.

"I used every endeavour, sir, but his lordship is in a very sound sleep."

"Use more endeavours," said Sir Evelyn. "Pour cold water over him if necessary, but bring him here."

This time the man was successful. Jimmy, yawning and dishevelled, walked into his uncle's room in his pyjamas.

"Read that," said Sir Evelyn, handing him the letter.

Jimmy, rubbing his eyes occasionally, read it through.

"Now," said Sir Evelyn, "tell me plainly, is there anything in it?"

"If you mean the cave, Uncle Evie, there isn't. Not a blessed thing except stones. They've had three policemen watching the entrance, turn about, since yesterday, but there isn't a thing in it except stones."

"Are you perfectly certain about that?"

"Dead sure thing," said Jimmy. "They can search till they're blue in the face. I'm told that they're going to search to-day. But they won't find anything. If I were you, Uncle Evie--of course, it's not my business to offer advice to you or any other big pot like the johnny who wrote this letter. But, if I were in your shoes or his, I'd tell the Customs people to search and be damned. In fact I rather thought of doing that exact thing myself, meeting them at Hailey Compton when they turn up and then gloating afterwards. I dare say it would be beneath your dignity to gloat, except in private. But if you care to run down with me this morning and watch this blessed search of theirs, I can promise that you'll be in a position to rub it in afterwards."

"I won't do that," said Sir Evelyn. "But----"

"I hardly thought you would. That sort of thing wouldn't suit your style."

"But I'll wire a definite denial of the whole story to London," said Sir Evelyn, "if you give me your assurance that I can do so."

"Pitch it as strong as you like. Pithy and straight from the shoulder. Not too long. It only looks as if you'd something to conceal if you go spreading yourself over five bob's worth of telegram. My idea would be 'Damned lies,' or words to that effect."

"I hope you really are perfectly certain, Jimmy," said Sir Evelyn. "This is a serious business. If it turns out afterwards that you're mistaken--if they find so much as one case of brandy----"

"They won't," said Jimmy. "I'll make over the Pallas Athene to an idiot asylum for the use of the inmates if they find anything worse than a half smoked cigarette in that cave."

"You'd know--you'd be certain to know if---"

"I steered the old lugger myself," said Jimmy, "and I know all there is to know about what happened."

Chapter XX

From a very early hour in the morning a sense of impending disaster hung over the village of Hailey Compton. The older Bunce stood at his cottage door with a sulky scowl on his face. The members of the lugger's crew, morose and anxious men, sought comfort at the Anchor Inn. They found the two policemen who were not on duty at the cave, and went away again uncomforted. The younger Bunce, Tommy Whittle, and others who had taken part in landing the cargo, wandered about disconsolate and miserable. No one knew what was going to happen. James Hinton, from whom it was natural to seek advice, had disappeared and no one knew where he had gone. There was some talk, low growling talk, about sending a deputation to the vicarage to ask Mrs. Eames for advice, or information, or anything else she might be inclined to give. No one believed that Mrs. Eames's advice would be any use, or her information the least reliable; but it would have been a comfort even to hear her talk.

At ten o'clock Gladys hurried down from the vicarage to visit her aunt. She reported excitedly that Mrs. Eames was still in bed and fast asleep, that the two young ladies were in bed so sound asleep that no noise wakened them. The village felt that its last prop and stay had been removed and settled down into gloomy silence.

Shortly before twelve o'clock the Pallas Athene, hooting constantly, came down the hill, and the sight of Jimmy's face, smiling and confident, brought a momentary cheerfulness to the village. But behind the Pallas Athene, close behind it, came another car, and in it, very soon discernible by the anxious eyes of the watchers, were men in uniform, that neat, half naval uniform of customs officers. The gloom of undefined dread settled down on everyone again. Old Bunce growled sulky curses. Younger men muttered threats, which they knew they dare not fulfil. Only Jimmy offered the officers any kind of welcome, but his manner made amends for the sullen hostility of everyone else. He was gay and jocular. He handed round his cigar case. He suggested draughts of beer to be drawn at his expense. He offered to act as guide to the cave. He accompanied the party along the street, over the green and across the loose white stones of the beach.

He would have gone with them into the cave but was stopped. The senior officer fully appreciated Jimmy's courtesy and friendliness. No Englishman is indifferent to the friendliness of an earl, and Jimmy had introduced himself. But no Englishman, when on duty, will allow even an earl the smallest privilege. Duty, especially duty done in uniform, is a very sacred thing. Jimmy was obliged to wait outside at the mouth of the cave.

He waited there for half an hour and smoked four cigarettes. He waited there another half-hour, smoking a pipe instead of cigarettes. After an hour and a half he sent the mentally deficient Whittle, the only villager who ventured near the cave, back to the Anchor Inn for beer. While he was drinking the beer the officers appeared again.

"Interesting place that cave," said Jimmy cheerfully. "Did you find anything inside?"

"You'll excuse my reminding you, my lord," said the senior officer, "that what we found and what we didn't find is no affair of yours."

"Of course not," said Jimmy. "Have a cigarette and some beer. You must want beer."

The senior officer did want beer. So did the others, all four of them. Jimmy's manner was engaging, and Jimmy, after all, was a real earl.

"Duty is duty, my lord," said the officer apologetically.

"And duty when done," said Jimmy, "deserves beer."

That was true, and duty when done permits of the relaxation of official dignity. The beer in Jimmy's jug was finished, and Whittle, grinning foolishly, fetched some more. That was drunk. Jimmy's cigarettes were finished. The senior officer thawed into a confidence.

"I didn't never expect to find anything in the cave, my lord, not me. It stands to reason that gentlemen like yourself and Sir Evelyn Dent wouldn't be trying those sort of tricks. But duty is duty."

"It is," said Jimmy, "always was, and I hope always will be."

"And when I got my orders, my lord, I obeyed them. But, in a manner of speaking, I knew pretty well we were after a mare's nest. The fellow that sent the information from France--well, I never did trust foreigners much, and of course it's from foreigners that sort of information mostly comes."

Chapter XXI

James Hinton waited in Parame for three weeks anxiously expecting news from Hailey Compton. When he got none he supposed, quite rightly, that nothing sensational had happened and that he was in no danger of arrest and imprisonment. He returned to the Anchor Inn and now carries on his business there as courteously and efficiently as before.

But James Hinton is a changed man. He has suffered disillusion. He speaks, with mysterious nods, and often in whispers, of a great financial loss which once fell on him. He goes into no details, but hints that he, an innocent and confiding man, was swindled by people whom he thought he could trust. He very nearly, but not quite, gave me his confidence when I was in Hailey Compton a fortnight ago and had a chat with him over a glass of beer.

"You wouldn't think, sir," he said, "that a lady like Mrs. Eames, a vicar's wife, would have stooped to such meanness. Though of course, Mrs. Eames does not belong to that class in which I have been accustomed to live, as a servant, you understand, sir. But I did think that his lordship, the present earl, would have been above it. The late earl would never have done such a thing. But there---- It's better not to talk about it. I can put up with the loss. It isn't that I mind most, but I've been a believer in our aristocracy all my life and it's a sad thing--a knock out, sir, if you'll allow me to express myself in such a way--a blow to my faith, sir, to find that----" He sighed heavily. "But I'd rather say no more about it, sir, if you'll excuse me."

Mr. Linker, who also returned to his business after a time, spoke much more plainly, and I regret to say more bitterly, when I called on him under pretext of buying some socks.

"I don't set up to be a gentleman myself," he said, "but I say that if a man is a gentleman he ought to behave as such. And that's what some gentlemen I know didn't do. I don't care to go into details. It wouldn't suit a man in my position to talk too much about the matter. But when a gentleman like Lord Colavon takes advantage of my temporary absence from home to convert to his own use property with regard to which he occupied a fiduciary position---- As for the lady associated with him--I refer to Mrs. Eames--well, I always was a Nonconformist, and if that is the sort of conduct we are to expect from the wives of the clergy of the Church of England, I shall remain a Nonconformist. I don't want to be accused of setting up too high a standard of conduct, but I do think that common honesty might have been expected of a lady in Mrs. Eames's position."

It was scarcely possible to miss the point of these reproaches. James Hinton and Linker believed that Mrs. Eames and Lord Colavon, probably Beth and Mary, possibly the vicar (I am not sure that Sir Evelyn escaped suspicion) had combined together to secure for their own use the whole cargo smuggled into Hailey Compton. Mrs. Eames and the girls were supposed to be wearing silk which belonged to Mr. Linker. Jimmy and the vicar--perhaps Sir Evelyn--were drinking Hinton's brandy and champagne. And the law--this was the hardest thing about the case--offered no redress to the injured men.

Old Bunce and his friends, indeed the whole village, believe just what Hinton and Linker do. There is naturally a little soreness, for the village had looked forward to a share of the spoil. But there is no deep resentment. Mrs. Eames has even risen in everybody's opinion. She is more respected than she used to be and Lord Colavon is regarded as an exceedingly clever man.

"To look at him," said old Bunce, "you wouldn't think there was much in him. And as for Mrs. Eames, anybody would think she was silly--what with her plays and her nonsense, just as silly as they make them. I was wrong about that, and I'm not one to be ashamed of owning up when I am wrong. That young fellow with the motor-car, Lord Colavon or whatever his name is, is as smart as paint, and Mrs. Eames isn't a fool, not by any manner of means."

Mrs. Eames, who knows exactly what is said and thought about her, feels her position acutely, and is trying to induce her husband to seek an exchange to some other parish. She cannot defend herself by telling the truth. To do that would be to invite raids on the cave with all sorts of evil results. She has, for many years, been doing all in her power for the village. She has devoted her unusual powers of mind and body to the service of the people of Hailey Compton, and now----

"It's very hard to bear," she said to me. "Not that I mind for myself. I don't, not a bit. But it's cruel to have poor darling Timothy misunderstood. Especially just when he really has done something for the village at last."

Jimmy, with whom I had a chance of talking the matter over yesterday, takes a different line.

"They think that of me, do they? By Jove!" he said. "Well, I dare say it's just as well they do. Unless they were satisfied that I had the stuff safely tucked away somewhere they'd go on searching for it till they found it. But, look here, you know, if I'm to be regarded as a thief I may as well do something to deserve it. I don't want to upset your aunt, Beth"--the Countess, looking very charming, was present during our talk--"and I wouldn't worry your uncle for the world, but as soon as they're safely out of Hailey Compton I'll go and get hold of that brandy. The silk will be ruined, of course, but the brandy will be all right, and I expect I could manage to hoist it up into the church again."

"Jimmy," said the Countess anxiously, "you wouldn't steal that brandy, would you?"

"Not for my own use," said Jimmy. "My idea would be to send it anonymously to the bishop for distribution among the country clergy. Those poor fellows must want cheering up and they get little enough of it. Just think of what your uncle Timothy's life would have been if he hadn't happened to marry your aunt. And there can't be many vicars' wives like her. That's why I think a few bottles of brandy and a dozen or so of fizz would be good for them. Their lives want brightening. Besides, the bishop would enjoy distributing it. He's a most benevolent old boy, and we owe him something. Uncle Evie told me he was in a dreadful state when he heard about the smuggling."

THE END

Hodder & Stoughton

Some New and Forthcoming Novels

THE DANCING FLOOR

By JOHN BUCHAN, author of "John Macnab," "Greenmantle," etc.

Sir Edward Leithen, who played a leading role in "John Macnab," gained the confidence of a young Englishman, haunted all his life by a dream, and of a girl, the heiress to a Greek island, whose quixotic sense of honour made her face alone a great peril. The inseverable connection between the destinies of the two, with the high test to which the courage of each was put, makes a great love story, a stirring, original adventure, and a fine study of modern youth.

HALF A SOVEREIGN

By IAN HAY, author of "A Knight on Wheels," "Paid with Thanks," etc.

Colonel Leslie Miles, naturally bashful and none too surely recovered from shell-shock, accepts the hospitality of Sir James Rumborough, his lawyer, and finds himself, much against his will, included in a yachting party of dull, cranky, and otherwise uncompanionable people, for a cruise in the Mediterranean. During the cruise, in which the sites of ancient cities are visited, he finds himself reconstructing the old barbaric scenes as if he were himself a living part of them. It is all very embarrassing for Leslie, but it is when he gets in touch with Dido Queen of Carthage, who for the occasion assumes the body of the youthful widow, Mrs. Hatton, with whom he is in love, that his real troubles begin.

THE PROPER PLACE

By O. DOUGLAS, author of "The Setons," "Pink Sugar," etc.

A story of the New Poor and the New Rich. Lady Jane Rutherford and her daughter, who sold their beautiful home in the Borders, and Mr. and Mrs. Jackson of Glasgow, who bought it, and struggled to live up to it, are some of the living characters that O. Douglas knows so well how to draw, and of whom she writes with such humour, pathos, and philosophy.

WORD OF HONOUR

Stories by "SAPPER," author of "Bull-Dog Drummond," "The Final Count," etc.

"Sapper" on top of his form. Here is another glorious volume of stories by the author of "Bull-Dog Drummond." Its note is swift drama, culminating into seeming irresistible crisis. More marked than ever is "Sapper's" peculiar attribute, whereby trivialities assume such potency in his hands that a tin of seccotine that didn't "stick" proves a far more dynamic weapon than all the knives and blunderbusses that ever draped the most bloody-minded buccaneer. A camera, boiling springs of Solfatara, an avenging Mamba, "a matter of voice," all play their volcanic roles; and though there is never a word too many, there is always a story too little in a "Sapper" collection.

LITTLE MRS. MANINGTON

By CECIL ROBERTS, author of "Scissors," "Sails of Sunset," etc.

Disaster was prophesied for the marriage of Richard Manington, a young English politician, with an American heiress. But Manington knew deep in his heart that he had not married for money, as Helen knew she had not married for position. Yet both these adjuncts of their love-match are there. The situation is subjected to Mr. Roberts' searching powers of analysis; the scenes have all his wizardry of description; while the dominating note is the sympathetic treatment of the actions and motives of enchanting Mrs. Manington.

THE PIGEON HOUSE

By VALENTINE WILLIAMS author of "The Man with the Club-foot," "The Red Mass," "Mr. Ramosi," etc.

Rex Garrett, rising young painter and adventurous soul, who once served in the Foreign Legion, vanishes on the night of his wedding to Sally Candlin, a beautiful American girl, companion to Marcia Greer, a rich widow. Mrs. Greer took Sally from a New York dressmaker's, but lets Rex think that his bride is an heiress. Sally lacks the courage to speak the truth until their wedding night, and immediately after her confession Rex disappears. Mystery is piled on mystery: thrill treads on the heels of thrill. As in all Valentine Williams's novels real people carry the tale along.

PRODIGALS OF MONTE CARLO

By E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM, author of "The Golden Beast," "Stolen Idols," etc.

Mr. Oppenheim is still "the Prince of Storytellers" and "Prodigals of Monte Carlo" is a princely story with a real Oppenheim plot and a real Oppenheim thrill. After a nasty toss in the hunting field Sir Hargrave Wendever consulted a heart specialist who implied that the Baronet might have only six or eight months more to live. Asking three of his friends hypothetically what each would do under the circumstances, he was told that one would try to execute a spectacular financial coup, another would spend the time in continuous pleasure at Monte Carlo, and a third would endeavour to make happy some people who could not be reached by ordinary charity. Sir Hargrave vowed to do all three.

THE SQUARE EMERALD

By EDGAR WALLACE, author of "The Crimson Circle," etc.

The three sisters Druze, around whom Mr. Wallace's amazing new book revolves, could not be described as living a quiet, normal life. They formed themselves into a gang for the fulfilment of multifarious activities not unconnected with forging, blackmail, impersonations, and anything that led to money and excitement. How the identity of these three enterprising women is established and their questionable proceedings laid bare by a slip of a girl detective forms an absorbing mystery story, bristling with the unexpected from start to finish.

SEA WHISPERS

By W. W. JACOBS, author of "Captains All," "Ship's Company," etc., with illustrations by BERT THOMAS.

A new volume of the inimitable stories which have made Mr. Jacobs famous all over the world. It is some years now since Mr. Jacobs has added to the world's humour and gaiety with such a volume, and we feel sure the night watchman and his friends--longshore and others--will make a triumphal return. It is impossible to imitate Mr. Jacobs--he has no imitators. His fun and his laughter are unique. The delicious illustrations of Mr. Bert Thomas do justice even to "Jacobs" characters.

THE UNDERSTANDING HEART

By PETER B. KYNE, author of "Cappy Ricks," "The Pride of Palomar," etc.

A tale of the early mining days in the West. "The Understanding Heart" tells of a man who braved persecution, and it records a wonderful love story and a deathless friendship.

RACHEL

By BEATRICE HARRADEN, author of "Spring Shall Plant," etc.

The "roving spirit" possessed Rachel, and she abandoned husband and family. She left consternation and fear of a scandal behind her among an array of relations, and Mrs. Harraden has some good-tempered fun at their expense. Rachel's husband narrowly escaped "designing" housekeepers, his Victorian sister was with difficulty prevented from practising her good works on the home. Meanwhile Rachel went her way, and her motives and justification receive keen-sighted and sympathetic treatment.

YESTERDAY'S HARVEST

By MARGARET PEDLER, author of "The Vision of Desire," etc.

The consequences of an unpremeditated theft and a chivalrous gesture belonging to the past cropped up again in the present. A new name, it appeared, did not give a new lease of life. Yesterday's harvest stood unreaped between Blair Maitland and Elizabeth when Elizabeth's father knew his story and refused him her hand in marriage. A tale of such romance, such dramatic intensity, and withal such dignity that it will be second to none among Mrs. Pedler's vibrant, enthralling books.

THE VOICE OF DASHIN

By "GANPAT," author of "Harilek," etc.

A fresh, fascinating book of adventure and action, picturesquely and vividly set in the Hinterlands of the Karakorum. In plot and in scene this travelled author departs from the beaten track. His City of Fairy Towers, fantastic though gruesome, the delightfully colloquial relations of the two young British officers who find their way thither, an unusual love interest (and all of it set off with a capital sense of fun), these are some of the elements in an up-to-date, adventurous romance of an unusual character.

WHAT IS TO BE

By J. C. SNAITH, author of "Thus Far," etc.

A romance of chivalrous adventure, moving surely towards its fore-ordained conclusion. John Rede Chandos married Ysa, an exiled young queen. Subsequent developments found him a Prince Consort in a European State, feeling slightly ridiculous and consistently, though gallantly, out of his depth. He tells his own story, in a self-deprecating, humorous manner, from the moment when he left his lawyer's office until the last phase, on a mountain-top, of "a battle he was born to lose."

THE SMUGGLER'S CAVE

By GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM, author of "The Search Party," "Spanish Gold," etc.

This is the story of the Hailey Compton Village Pageant. The people who organised it, the vicar's wife and the local innkeeper, were unknown to fame. It had, at first, little or no backing in the press or aristocratic patronage. It was started in a casual, a most accidental way. Yet the Hailey Compton Pageant excited England from end to end, set every club in London gossiping, inspired a spate of articles in the daily papers, gravely affected the reputation of one of our oldest and most honoured families, and went near wrecking the prospects of one of our historic political parties.

THE BLACK HUNTER

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

First Reviews: "James Oliver Curwood, one of the best of the romantic translators of the life of the Canadian wilderness, has given us a fine historical novel... His tale is a great love story, strongly dramatic in its episodes, and the fight at the end of the book is Homeric."--*Liverpool Daily Courier*. "This stirring novel... This story of the tragic love of David Rock and Anne St. Denis and the treachery of the Intendent Bigot makes a memorable period live again."--*Daily Mail*. "An historical novel of much distinction. It takes us back to the days when old Quebec was in the hands of the French, and when the great struggle between French and English was about to begin.... Mr. Curwood has given us an informative, thrilling and finely written book."--*Edinburgh Evening News*.

DAVID WILDING

By RICHMAL CROMPTON, author of "The House," "The Wildings," etc.

Another friendly and humorous inquiry into the family life of the Wildings, handled with a touch so deft that the Wildings will be recognised in many a home. David's problem had become acute, with a wife who flaunted the family

tradition, and a baby at whose christening and subsequent receptions all sorts of incompatible Wildings had to meet. There are rebellions and declarations of independence. But David's mother never lost her hold on the situation.

THE AMAZING CHANCE

By PATRICIA WENTWORTH, author of "The Black Cabinet," "The Dower House Mystery," etc.

Anton Blum, a deaf and dumb German peasant, came to after an accident, and spoke--in English. He gave conclusive evidence that he was a Laydon, though changed beyond recognition. But which of the supposedly dead brothers he proved to be; whether he knew himself; and whether Evelyn, who had married Jim Laydon, could tell, makes a most romantic, enthralling problem, at whose solution the reader is kept guessing all the time.

THE PLANTER OF THE TREE

By RUBY M. AYRES, author of "The Man the Women Loved," "The Marriage Handicap," etc

Philip Sanderson, a "waster" who spends his days in third-rate London clubs and cabarets, is in love with a dancer, Sally Lingfield, who cares nothing for him, but loves another man who is only amusing himself at her expense. One night, when the worse for drink, Philip knocks her down with his car, hopelessly crippling her so that she will never be able to dance again. The shock sobers him and brings all his better nature to the front.

THREE PEOPLE

By MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY, author of "Sleeping Dogs," etc.

For this most fascinating story Mabel Barnes-Grundy has created "three people" who will remain clear and distinct in the minds and memories of her readers. All the beauty of the love and devotion which can bind together a brother and sister shines forth from the pages of this book. Then two people become three people. There steps into the lives of this brother and sister, a man, a German by birth, but with the blood of his English grandmother in his veins. Ronnie has a hatred of Germans amounting almost to an obsession. He has sworn an oath that never--knowingly--will he speak to a German again. The story works up to a dramatic climax; the atmosphere is delightful. There is wit and sparkle in the conversation.

THE STRANGE FAMILY

By E. H. LACON WATSON.

Here is a chronicle of rare charm. It has about it the unsensational suggestion of authenticity. In quiet fashion it relates the early years of the children of a country rector. It gives an amusing picture of types and incidents in a village community. It passes with Rudolf Strange to Cambridge and becomes an illuminating record of the University in the 'eighties. A penetrating observation of character and period.

THE THIRD MESSENGER

By PATRICK WYNNNTON, author of "The Black Turret."

Trapped in a thieves' den, shut in with the corpse of a former victim, with death imminent, Hugh Carr, in his extremity, promises Providence that if he escapes he will make his life a worthier thing. In "The Third Messenger" Patrick Wynnton relates the result of that promise. For Providence gives Carr his chance, and gives her chance also to Kitty Magen, the luxury-sickened daughter of a millionaire. The final triumphant pageant of courage and love unconquered--all go to make this swift, keen story a more than worthy successor to "The Black Turret."

OUT OF THESE THINGS

By JAMES A. MORLEY.

The title of this novel, "Out of These Things," is actually an adaptation of a quotation from Hugh Walpole's works--"Of these things ... cometh the making of man,"--and it really fits the story, a story which has to do with the affairs of youth and age--a twelve-year-old and a man in love, scientific research and a secret passage, etc. There is a great deal of truth to human nature, and of sincerity to the influences of scenery in this book. The very inconclusiveness of its ending gives it a plausibility, and artistry which a more conventional finale would not exhibit. It has literary style and is a story of unusual character, of fine quality. "Out of These Things" is a first novel, very strongly endorsed by an eminent literary authority, and its author should have a great future.

THE PENDULUM

By MRS. BURNETT-SMITH.

This story is an intimate and considered study of the growth, development and extraordinary phases of experience

through which so many individuals and families had to pass during the most testing years of British history. It is told in the form of a woman's diary, and presents a vivid picture, both of family life and that deeper, more intimate life of the heart which is the determining factor in the majority of lives.

BEVIL GRANVILLE'S HANDICAP

By JOSEPH HOCKING, author of "The Wagon and the Star," etc.

Bevil Granville, a young fellow of good name and a fine, generous nature, is accused of forgery and embezzlement. At the end of seven years of penal servitude he had become hard, sullen, cruel, vindictive. His one thought on leaving prison was to find out the person who had really committed the deed for which he was punished and to wreak his revenge. The narrative describes in a series of quick moving events his endeavours to discover the guilty person, the forces which were brought to bear on his life, his love and his hatred, the battle between good and evil and the final result of his schemes. There are fine descriptions of Cornish scenes and Cornish life and character, with all their simplicity and charm.

HER PIRATE PARTNER

By BERTA RUCK, author of "The Pearl Thief," "The Dancing Star," etc.

Miss Berta Ruck states the case for a girl of to-day who is restricted by a Victorian guardian's opinion that a good home should be enough. Young men and outside friends were *taboo*. How Dorothea took the law into her own hands, how she was extricated from a series of difficulties, makes a delightful story that is modern in the best sense of the word.

IT HAPPENED IN PEKIN

By LOUISE JORDAN MILN, author of "In a Shantung Garden," etc.

Another opportunity for Western eyes to see a little farther, penetrate a little deeper into the mysterious heart of China. The brilliant author of "Ruben and Ivy Sen" wields a searchlight which falls direct upon Chinese traditions and customs, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears.

MASTER VORST

By "SEAMARK," author of "Love's Enemy," "The Silent Six," etc.

Somewhere along the River, down past the Pool, the Death Maker has a laboratory--a germ-farm crawling alive with all the most hideous disease cultures you can think of. The maker of death has cultivated enough sudden death in this germ-farm to wipe out London in a night, and all Britain in a week. As we follow the intrepid Maine through the inner heart of Chinatown, there comes a feeling that sandbags descending from upper windows upon the passer-by are by no means beyond the range of possibility. It is all very well done--very convincing--and the reader will give thanks for Scotland Yard and men like Kellard Maine.

THE DESERT THOROUGHbred

By JACKSON GREGORY, author of "Desert Valley," "The Wilderness Trail," etc.

In Jackson Gregory's latest and greatest story two lonely souls on their respective oases--widely separated by miles of burning desert sand--found one another after much adventure and tribulation. They came within an ace of disaster and death; Lasalle, outcast from his fellow men for a supposed murder, Camilla, bereft of protection, wandering in the desert. A powerful drama of the open spaces.

THE D'ARBLAY MYSTERY

By R. AUSTIN FREEMAN, author of "The Red Thumb-mark," "The Singing Bone," etc.

The discovery of a murdered man; the criminal unknown; the complete absence of clues; everything, in fact, which brings Thorndyke into his own, opens this absorbing mystery. He accumulates unnoticed evidence in his best manner, and leads his investigations up to a startling *denouement*, which comes as a complete surprise.

SECRET HARBOUR

By STEWART EDWARD WHITE, author of "Arizona Nights," etc.

"X. Anaxagoras, Healer of Souls," found that his cure for indifference to life must be repeated on his brother-in-law, Roger Marshall. So he prescribed strenuous living and furious excitement. In that extraordinary and mysterious manner of his, he got to work, and deciding that Marshall would benefit by becoming a criminal, he arranged a neat crime for him. Stewart Edward White, whose own life has consisted mainly of action and excitement, has surpassed

himself in this story of adventure in Canadian waters.

COUSIN JANE

By HARRYLEON WILSON, author of "Ruggles of Red Cap," etc.

Harry Leon Wilson's humour and charm find new and productive investment in "Cousin Jane." She was a young woman ill-suited to settle down among relatives who lived on the departed glory of a Californian fortune made in the 'sixties. Jane had inherited something of the pioneer spirit which found that fortune, and she salvaged something of the wrecked estate and gained for herself a place in the new age which had come while she worked.

THE LAW OF THE TALON

By LOUIS TRACY, author of "The Gleeve Mystery," etc.

A wonderfully absorbing story, which opens in the Hudson Bay district and is played out in the Scottish Highlands, with all their weird colour and eerie charm. To secure his cousin's fiancée Eileen, and the succession to Inverlochty, which should go to Lord Oban's son, John Panton, the specious Alastair had bribed Sergeant Ferdinand Conington to drug his superior officer just before an engagement. Court-martialled as a drunkard and a coward, Panton is cast off by his father, and for seven years he disappears. But news percolates at last even to Hudson Bay, and, accompanied by his only friend, the Canadian husky, "Spot," Panton dashes homewards in the hope of saving the woman he loves from a disastrous marriage.

THE PASSIONLESS QUEST

By CHARLES CANNELL, author of "The Guardian of the Cup."

John Francis Algernon de Courci Delouede, one of the Worcestershire Delouedes, comes up against something new—a girl, little more than a school-girl, to whom his wealth and influence make no appeal! Elsie Farrar goes straight to the heart not only of John, but also of every reader who starts out to follow her on the "passionless quest." Enriquez is a sheer delight; and the famous trio, Mackenzie, Martin Kent, and Wally Evans, are men who forge ahead and get things done in that quiet and undemonstrative fashion which we like to regard as wholly British.

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