Eliza

by Barry Pain

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ELIZA ***

Transcriber's Note: Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note. Dialect spellings, contractions and discrepancies have been retained.

ELIZA

Says ROBERT BARR in The Idler:—

"... and as for Barry Pain's 'Eliza' I question if anything more deliciously humourous, and of a humour so restrained, has been written since the time of Lamb."

It was true I ran into the horse.

"It was true I ran into the horse." (See page 24.)

By

BARRY PAIN

ILLUSTRATED BY WALLACE GOLDSMITH

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ELIZA'S HUSBAND

"Suppose," I said to one of the junior clerks at our office the other day, "you were asked to describe yourself in a few words, could you do it?"

His answer that he could describe me in two was no answer at all. Also the two

words were not a description, and were so offensive that I did not continue the conversation.

I believe there are but few people who could give you an accurate description of themselves. Often in the train to and from the city, or while walking in the street, I think over myself—what I have been, what I am, what I might be if, financially speaking, it would run to it. I imagine how I should act under different circumstances—on the receipt of a large legacy, or if for some specially clever action I were taken into partnership, or if a mad bull came down the street. I may say that I make a regular study of myself. I have from time to time recorded on paper some of the more important incidents of our married life, affecting Eliza and myself, and I present them to you, gentle reader, in this little volume. I think they show how with a very limited income—and but for occasional assistance from Eliza's mother I do not know how we should have got along—a man may to a great extent preserve respectability, show taste and judgment, and manage his wife and home.

The more I think about myself, the more—I say it in all modesty—the subject seems to grow. I should call myself many-sided, and in many respects unlike ordinary men. Take, for instance, the question of taste. Some people would hardly think it worth while to mention a little thing like taste; but I do. I am not rich, but what I have I like to have ornamental, though not loud. Only the other day the question of glass-cloths for the kitchen turned up, and though those with the red border were threepence a dozen dearer than the plain, I ordered them without hesitation. Eliza changed them next day, contrary to my wishes, and we had a few words about it, but that is not the point. The real point is that if your taste comes out in a matter of glass-cloths for the kitchen, it will also come out in antimacassars for the drawing-room and higher things.

Again, ordinary men—men that might possibly call themselves my equals—are not careful enough about respectability. Everywhere around me I see betting on

horse-races, check trousers on Sunday, the wash hung out in the front garden, whiskey and soda, front steps not properly whitened, and the door-handle not up to the mark. I could point to houses where late hours on Sunday are so much the rule that the lady of the house comes down in her dressing-gown to take in the milk—which, I am sure, Eliza would sooner die than do. There are families—in my own neighbourhood, I am sorry to say—where the chimneys are not swept regularly, beer is fetched in broad daylight, and attendance at a place of worship on Sunday is rather the exception than the rule. Then, again, language is an important point; to my mind nothing marks a respectable man more than the use of genteel language. There may have been occasions when excessive provocation has led me to the use of regrettable expressions, but they have been few. As a rule I avoid not only what is profane, but also anything that is slangy. I fail to understand this habit which the present generation has formed of picking up some meaningless phrase and using it in season and out of season. For some weeks I have been greatly annoyed by the way some of the clerks use the phrase "What, ho, she bumps!" If you ask them who bumps, or how, or why, they have no answer but fits of silly laughter. Probably, before these words appear in print that phrase will have been forgotten and another equally ridiculous will have taken its place. It is not sensible; what is worse, it is not to my mind respectable. Do not imagine that I object to humour in conversation. That is a very different thing. I have made humourous remarks myself before now, mostly of rather a cynical and sarcastic kind.

I am fond of my home, and any little addition to its furniture or decorations gives me sincere pleasure. Both in the home and in our manner of life there are many improvements which I am prevented by financial considerations from carrying out. If I were a rich man I would have the drawing-room walls a perfect mass of pictures. If I had money I could spend it judiciously and without absurdity. I should have the address stamped in gold on the note-paper, and use boot-trees, and never be without a cake in the house in case a friend dropped in to tea. Nor should I think twice about

putting on an extra clean pair of cuffs in the week if wanted. We should keep two servants. I am interested in the drama, if serious, and two or three times every month I should take Eliza to the dress-circle. Our suburb has a train service which is particularly convenient for the theatres. Eliza would wear a dressy blouse,—she shares my objections to anything cut out at the neck,—a mackintosh, and a sailor hat, the two latter to be removed before entering. I should carry her evening shoes in a pretty crewel-worked bag. We have often discussed it. Curiously enough, she already has the bag, though we seldom have an opportunity to use it in this way. Doubtless there are many other innovations which, with appropriate means, I could suggest. But I have said enough to show that they would all be in the direction of refinement and elegance, and the money would not be spent in foolishness or vice.

As Eliza's husband, I should perhaps say a word or two about her. She is a lady of high principles and great activity. Owing to my absence every day in the exercise of my profession, she is called upon to settle many questions,—as, for instance, the other day the question of what contribution, if any, should be given to the local Fire Brigade,—where a word of advice from me would have been useful. If not actually independent, she is certainly not what would be described as a clinging woman. Indeed, she does occasionally take upon herself to enter on a line of action without consulting me, when my advice is perfectly at her disposal, and would perhaps save her from blunders. Last year she filled the coal-cellar (unusually large for the type of house) right up at summer prices. Undoubtedly, she thought that she was practising an economy. But she was dealing with a coal-merchant who does not give credit—a man who requires cash down and sees that he gets it. And—well, I need not go into details here, but it proved to be excessively inconvenient for me. She has lost the silly playfulness which was rather a mark of her character during the period of our engagement, and if this is due to the sobering effects of association with a steady and thoughtful character, I am not displeased. She herself says it's the work, but the women do not always know. Possibly, too, her temper is more easily ruffled now

than then when I point out things to her. I should say that she was less ambitious than myself. I do not mention these little matters at all by way of finding fault. On the contrary, I have a very high opinion of Eliza.

Filled the coal-cellar right up at summer prices.

"Filled the coal-cellar right up at summer prices."

We have no children living.

With these few prefatory words, gentle reader, I fling open the front door—to use a metaphorical expression—and invite you to witness a few scenes of our domestic life that I have from time to time recorded.

THE CARDS

About a year ago Eliza and myself had a little difference of opinion. I mentioned to her that we had no visiting-cards.

"Of course not," she said. "The idea of such a thing!" She spoke rather hastily.

"Why do you say 'of course not'?" I replied, quietly. "Visiting-cards are, I believe, in common use among ladies and gentlemen."

She said she did not see what that had to do with it.

"It has just this much to do with it," I answered: "that I do not intend to go without visiting-cards another day!"

"What's the use?" she asked. "We never call on anybody, and nobody ever calls on us."

"Is Miss Sakers nobody?"

"Well, she's never left a card here, and she really is a lady by birth, and can prove it. She just asks the girl to say she's been, and it's nothing of importance, when she doesn't find me in. If she can do without cards, we can. You'd much better go by her."

"Thank you, I have my own ideas of propriety, and I do not take them from Miss

Sakers. I shall order fifty of each sort from Amrod's this morning."

"Then that makes a hundred cards wasted."

"Either you cannot count," I said, "or you have yet to learn that there are three sorts of cards used by married people—the husband's cards, the wife's cards, and the card with both names on it."

"Go it!" said Eliza. "Get a card for the cat as well. She knows a lot more cats than we know people!"

I could have given a fairly sharp retort to that, but I preferred to remain absolutely silent. I thought it might show Eliza that she was becoming rather vulgar. Silence is often the best rebuke. However, Eliza went on:

"Mother would hate it, I know that. To talk about cards, with the last lot of coals not paid for—I call it wickedness."

I simply walked out of the house, went straight down to Amrod's, and ordered those cards. When the time comes for me to put my foot down, I can generally put it down as well as most people. No one could be easier to live with than I am, and I am sure Eliza has found it so; but what I say is, if a man is not master in his own house, then where is he?

Amrod printed the cards while I waited. I had them done in the Old English character. I suggested some little decoration to give them a tone,—an ivy leaf in the corner, or a little flourish under the name,—but Amrod was opposed to this. He seemed to think it was not essential, and it would have been charged extra, and also he had nothing of the kind in stock. So I let that pass. The cards looked very well as they were, a little plain and formal, perhaps, but very clean (except in the case of a few where the ink had rubbed), and very gratifying to one's natural self-respect.

He seemed to think it was not essential.

"He seemed to think it was not essential."

That evening I took a small cardboard box that had contained candles, and packed in it a few carefully selected flowers from the garden, and one of our cards. On the card I wrote "With kindest love from" just above the names, and posted it to Eliza's mother.

So far was Eliza's mother from being offended that she sent Eliza a present of a postal-order for five shillings, three pounds of pressed beef, and a nicely worked apron.

On glancing over that sentence, I see that it is, perhaps, a little ambiguous. The postal order was for the shillings alone—not for the beef or the apron.

I only mention the incident to show whether, in this case, Eliza or I was right.

I put a few of my own cards in my letter-case, and the rest were packed away in a drawer. A few weeks afterward I was annoyed to find Eliza using some of her cards for winding silks. She said that it did not prevent them from being used again, if they were ever wanted.

"Pardon me," I said, "but cards for social purposes should not be bent or frayed at the edge, and can hardly be too clean. Oblige me by not doing that again!"

That evening Eliza told me that No. 14 in the Crescent had been taken by some people called Popworth.

"That must be young Popworth who used to be in our office," I said. "I heard that he was going to be married this year. You must certainly call and leave cards."

"Which sort, and how many?"

"Without referring to a book, I can hardly say precisely. These things are very much a matter of taste. Leave enough—say one of each sort for each person in the house. There should be no stint."

"How am I to know how many persons there are?"

"Ask the butcher with whom they deal."

On the following day I remarked that Popworth must have come in for money, to be taking so large a house, and I hoped she had left the cards.

"I asked the butcher, and he said there was Popworth, his wife, two sisters, a German friend, and eleven children. That was sixteen persons, and made forty-eight cards altogether. You see, I remembered your rule."

"My dear Eliza," I said, "I told you as plainly as possible that it was a matter of taste. You ought not to have left forty-eight at once."

"Oh, I couldn't keep running backwards and forwards leaving a few at a time. I've got something else to do. There's three pair of your socks in the basket waiting to be darned, as it is."

"And, good heavens! That Popworth can't be my Popworth. If he's only married this year, he can't, in the nature of things, have got eleven children. And a house like this can't call on a house like that without a something to justify it."

"That's what I thought."

"Then what on earth did you call for?"

"I didn't. Who said I did?"

I gave a sigh of relief. Later in the evening, when Eliza took a card, notched a bit out of each side, and began winding silk on it, I thought it wiser to say nothing. It is better sometimes to pretend not to see things.

ELIZA'S MOTHER

I generally send Eliza to spend a day with her mother early in December, and try to cheer her up a little. I daresay the old lady is very lonely, and appreciates the kindly thought. The return ticket is four-and-two, and Eliza generally buys a few flowers to take with her. That does not leave much change out of five shillings when the day is over, but I don't grudge the money. Eliza's mother generally tries to find out, without precisely asking, what we should like for a Christmas present. Eliza does not

actually tell her, or even hint it—she would not care to do anything of that sort. But she manages, in a tactful sort of way, to let her know.

For instance, the year before last Eliza's mother happened to say, "I wonder if you know what I am going to give you this Christmas."

Eliza said, "I can see in your eye, mother, and you sha'n't do it. It's much too expensive. If other people can do without silver salt-cellars, I suppose we can."

Well, we got them; so that was all right. But last year it was more difficult.

You see, early in last December I went over my accounts, and I could see that I was short. For one thing, Eliza had had the measles. Then I had bought a bicycle, and though I sold it again, it did not, in that broken state, bring in enough to pay the compensation to the cabman. I was much annoyed about that. It was true I ran into the horse, but it was not my fault that it bolted and went into the lamp-post. As I said, rather sharply, to the man when I paid him, if his horse had been steady the thing would never have happened. He did not know what to answer, and made some silly remark about my not being fit to ride a mangle. Both then and at the time of the accident his language was disrespectful and profane.

However, I need not go further into that. It is enough to say that we had some unusual expenses, and were distinctly short.

"I don't blame you, Eliza," I said. "Anything you have had you are very welcome to."

"I haven't had anything, except the measles," she said; "and I don't see how you can blame me for that."

"But," I said, "I think it's high time you paid a visit to your mother, and showed her that we have not forgotten her. Take some Swiss roll—about sixpennyworth. Try to make things seem a little brighter to her. If she says anything about Christmas, and you saw your way to getting a cheque from her this year instead of her usual present, you might do that. But show her that we are really fond of her—remember she is

your mother, and has few pleasures. A fiver just now would make a good deal of difference to me, and even a couple of sovereigns would be very handy."

When Eliza came back, I saw by her face that it was all right.

"I didn't have to say anything," she said. "Mother told me of her own accord that she knew that you had money troubles, and that she was going to take advantage of the Christmas season to relieve you from them in a way which at another time you might be too proud to accept."

"That," I said, warmly, "is very thoughtful of her, and very delicate, and it can only mean one thing. It settles me. This year, Eliza, we will give your mother a present. Quite a trifle, of course—about two shillings. It will be a token, and she will value it."

When I returned from the city I found that Eliza had purchased a small white vase for one-and-ten. The man in the shop had told her that it was alabaster. I had my doubts about that, but it was quite in my own taste—rather severe and classical. I complimented Eliza on her choice.

Three days before Christmas I got a letter from Eliza's mother. She said that she had been afraid that I was worrying about my debt to her of £4 13s. 9d. She took advantage of the Christmas season to return my I.O.U.'s, and begged me to consider the debt as paid.

It was not at all what I had expected.

"No," I said to Eliza at breakfast, "I am not in the least like a bear with a sore head, and I will thank you not to use the expression. As for your mother's kindness, I am glad you think it kindness. I wouldn't have it otherwise. If you weren't a born idiot you wouldn't think so. My debt to your mother would have been discharged by—discharged in due course. By reminding me that I owed her money, she has practically dunned me for it, and forced me to pay her at a most inconvenient time. She comes badgering me for her dirty money at Christmas, and you call it 'kindness!'

Kindness! Hah! Oh, hah, hah!"

"Don't make those silly noises, and get on with your breakfast!" said Eliza.

Afterward she asked me if I still meant to send her mother that little vase.

"Oh, yes!" I said. "We can afford it; it's nothing to us."

Eliza, entirely misunderstanding the word that I next used, got up and said that she would not stop in the room to hear her poor mother sworn at.

"The word I used," I said, calmly, "was alabaster, and not what you suppose."

"You pronounced it just like the other thing."

"I pronounced it in an exclamatory manner," I replied, "from contempt! You seem to me very ready to think evil. This is not the first time!"

Eliza apologized. As a matter of fact, I really did say alabaster. But I said it emphatically, and I own that it relieved my feelings.

We keep the silver salt-cellars in the drawer of Eliza's wardrobe as a general rule. I should prefer to use them every day, or at any rate every Sunday. But Eliza says that they make work.

"Mother has written to me," she said on the following day, "to say that she will dine with us on Christmas Day. I had better get the silver salt-cellars down."

"You'd better put them up," I said, meaningly. I know that sounds rather bitter, but I confess that I have always had a weakness for the wit that stings.

Well, it did not actually come to that. They allowed me to draw a couple of pounds in advance at the office. I suppose they know that when they have got a good man it is worth while to stretch a point to keep him. Not that I was at all dictatorial—apparently I asked it as a favour. But I fancy our manager saw that I was not a man to be played with.

Eliza's mother dined with us, and brought a couple of ducks. Conscience, I should say.

At the moment of writing my financial position is absolutely sound, and even if Eliza's mother forced me to use her present to me to pay my debt to her (£7 19s. 5d.), though I might think it dishonourable on her part, I should not be seriously inconvenienced. However, Eliza is going early in December to suggest sauce-boats (plated). That is to say, she may possibly mention them if any occasion arises.

MISS SAKERS

On Saturdays I always get back from the office early. This particular Saturday afternoon I looked at our chimneys as I came down the street. I thought it very queer, but, to make certain, as soon as I got into the house I opened the drawing-room door. It was just as I thought. I called up-stairs to Eliza, rather sharply.

She came down and said, "Well, what's the matter?"

I said, calmly, "The matter? Jane has apparently gone mad, that's all." (Jane is the name of our servant.)

Eliza said that she did not think so, and asked me what the girl had done.

I must say it made me feel rather sarcastic—it would have made any man feel sarcastic. I said, "Oh, nothing. Merely lit the fire in the drawing-room; and not only lit it, but piled coals on it. It is not Sunday, so far as I am aware." It is our rule to have the drawing-room fire lit on Sundays only. We are rather exclusive, and some other people seem to be rather stuck-up, and between the two we do not have many callers. If any one comes, it is always perfectly easy for Eliza to say, "The housemaid has foolishly forgotten to light the fire here. Shall we not step into the dining-room?" I hate to see anything like waste.

"At this very moment," I added, "the drawing-room fire is flaming half-way up the chimney. It seems we can afford to burn half a ton of coals for nothing. I cannot say that I was aware of it."

"You are satirical!" said Eliza. "I always know when you are being satirical, because

you move your eyebrows, and say, 'I am aware,' instead of 'I know.' I told Jane to light the fire myself."

"May I ask why?"

"Miss Sakers is coming in. She sent me a note this morning to say so."

"That puts a different complexion on the affair. Very tactful of her to have announced the intention. I do not grudge a handful of firing when there is a reason. I only ask that there shall be a reason." Miss Sakers is the vicar's daughter. Strictly speaking, I suppose her social position is superior to our own. I know for a fact that she has been to county balls. She seemed anxious to cultivate an intimacy with us, so I gathered. I was not absurdly pleased about it. One has one's dignity. Besides, at the office we frequently see people far above Miss Sakers. A nobleman who had called to see one of the partners once remarked to me, "Your office is a devilish long way from everywhere!" There was no particular reason why he should have spoken to me, but he seemed to wish it. After that, it was no very great thing that Miss Sakers seemed anxious to know us better. At the same time, I do not pretend that I was displeased. I went into the drawing-room and put some more coal on.

"Is it to be a party?" I asked.

"Not at all. She is coming quite as a friend."

I went up-stairs and changed all my clothes, and then purchased a few flowers, which I placed in vases in the drawing-room. Eliza had got two kinds of cake; I added a plate of mixed biscuits on my own responsibility. Beyond this, I did nothing in the way of preparation, wishing to keep the thing as simple and informal as possible.

The tea was quite a success. Miss Sakers was to have a stall at the bazaar in aid of the new church. I promised her five shillings at first, but afterward made it seven-and-six. Though no longer young, Miss Sakers is very pleasant in her manner.

After tea Miss Sakers and Eliza both did needlework. Miss Sakers was doing a thing

in crewels. I could not see what Eliza was doing. She kept it hidden, almost under the table.

To prevent the conversation from flagging, I said, "Eliza, dear, what are you making?"

She frowned hard at me, shook her head slightly, and asked Miss Sakers about the special preacher for Epiphany Sunday.

I at once guessed that Eliza was doing something for Miss Sakers' stall at the bazaar, and had intended to keep it secret.

I smiled. "Miss Sakers," I said, "I do not know what Eliza is making, but I am quite sure it is for you."

There was a dead silence. Miss Sakers and Eliza both blushed. Then Miss Sakers said, without looking at me, "I think you are mistaken."

I felt so sure that I was mistaken that I blushed, too.

Eliza hurriedly hid her work in the work-basket, and said, "It is very close in here. Let me show you round our little garden."

They both went out, without taking any notice of me. Not having had much tea, I cut myself another slice of cake. While I was in the middle of it, Miss Sakers and Eliza came back, and Miss Sakers said good-bye to me very coldly. I offered to raise my bazaar donation to ten shillings, but she did not seem to have heard me.

"How could you say that?" said Eliza, when Miss Sakers had gone. "It was most tactless—and not very nice."

"I thought you were doing something for the bazaar. What were you making, then?"

She did not actually tell me, but she implied it in a delicate way.

"Well," I said, "of course I wouldn't have called attention to it if I had known, but I don't think you ought to have been doing that work when Miss Sakers was here."

"I've no time to waste, and I always make mine myself. I was most careful to keep

them hidden. You are very tactless."

"I don't think much of that Miss Sakers," I said. "Why should we go to this expense," pointing to the cakes, "for a woman of that kind?"

THE ORCHESTROME

The orchestrome was on Lady Sandlingbury's stall at the bazaar. Her ladyship came up to Eliza in the friendliest way, and said, "My dear lady, I am convinced that you need an orchestrome. It's the sweetest instrument in the world, worth at least five pounds, and for one shilling you have a chance of getting it. It is to be raffled." Eliza objects, on principle, to anything like gambling; but as this was for the Deserving Inebriates, which is a good cause, she paid her shilling. She won the orchestrome, and I carried it home for her.

Six tunes were given with the orchestrome; each tune was on a slip of perforated paper, and all you had to do was to put in a slip and touch the spring.

We tried it first with "The Dandy Coloured Coon." It certainly played something, but it was not right. There was no recognizable tune about it.

"This won't do at all," I said.

"Perhaps that tune's got bent or something," said Eliza. "Put in another."

I put in "The Lost Chord" and "The Old Folks at Home," and both were complete failures—a mere jumble of notes, with no tune in them at all. I confess that this exasperated me.

"You see what you've done?" I said. "You've fooled away a shilling. Nothing is more idiotic than to buy a thing without trying it first."

"Why didn't you say that before, then?" said Eliza. "I don't believe there's anything really wrong with it—just some little thing that's got out of order, and can be put right again."

"Wrong! Why, it's wrong all through. Not one scrap of any of the tunes comes out

right. I shall take it back to Lady Sandlingbury at once."

"Oh, don't do that!"

But my mind was made up, and I went back to the bazaar, and up to Lady Sandlingbury's stall. Eliza wouldn't come with me.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," I said, "but your ladyship supplied me with this orchestrome, and your ladyship will have to take it back again."

"Dear me! what's all the trouble?"

I started the instrument, and let her hear for herself. She smiled, and turned to another lady who was helping her. The other lady was young, and very pretty, but with a scornful kind of amused expression, and a drawling way of speaking—both of which I disliked extremely.

"Edith," said Lady Sandlingbury, "here's this angry gentleman going to put us both in prison for selling him a bad orchestrome. He says it won't work."

"Doesn't matter, does it?" said the other lady. "I mean to say, as long as it will play, you know." At this rather stupid remark they both laughed, without so much as looking at me.

"I don't want to make myself in any way unpleasant, your ladyship," I said; "but this instrument was offered for raffle as being worth five pounds, and it's not worth five shillings."

"Come, now," said Lady Sandlingbury, "I will give you five shillings for it. There you are! Now you can be happy, and go and spend your money." I thanked her. She took the orchestrome and started it, and it played magnificently. Nothing could have been more perfect. "These things do better," she said, "when you don't put the tunes in wrong end first, so that the instrument plays them backwards."

"I think your ladyship might have told me that before," I said.

"Oh! you were so angry, and you didn't ask me. Edith, dear, do go and be civil to

some people, and make them take tickets for another raffle."

"I call this sharp practice," I said, "if not worse, and——"

Here the other lady interrupted me.

"Could you, please, go away, unless you want to buy something? Thanks, so much!"

Could you, please, go away?

"Could you, please, go away?"

I went. I am rather sorry for it now. I think it would have been more dignified to have stopped and defied them.

Eliza appeared to think that I had made myself ridiculous. I do not agree with her. I do think, however, that when members of the aristocracy practise a common swindle in support of a charity, they go to show that rank is not everything. If Miss Sakers happens to ask us whether we are going to the bazaar in support of the Deserving Inebriates next year, I have instructed Eliza to reply: "Not if Lady Sandlingbury and her friend have a stall." I positively refuse to meet them, and I do not care twopence if they know it.

THE TONIC PORT

We do a large export trade (that is, the firm does), and there are often samples lying about in the office. There was a bottle of Tarret's Tonic Port, which had been there some time, and one of the partners told the head clerk that he could have it if he liked. Later in the day the head clerk said if a bottle of Tarret's Tonic Port was any use to me I might take it home. He said he had just opened it and tasted it, because he did not like to give anything away until he knew if it was all right.

I thanked him. "Tastes," I said, "just like any ordinary port, I suppose?"

"Well," he said, "it's more a tonic port than an ordinary port. But that's only what you'd expect from the label."

"Quite so," I said—"quite so." I looked at the label, and saw that it said that the port

was peculiarly rich in phosphates. I put the bottle in my bag that night and took it home.

"Eliza," I said, "I have brought you a little present. It is a bottle of port." Eliza very rarely takes anything at all, but if she does it is a glass of port. In this respect I admire her taste. Port, as I have sometimes said to her, is the king of wines. We decided that we would have a glass after supper. That is really the best time to take anything of the kind; the wine soothes the nerves and prevents insomnia.

Eliza picked the bottle up and looked at the label. "Why," she said, "you told me it was port!"

"So it is."

"It says tonic port on the label."

"Well, tonic port practically is port. That is to say, it is port with the addition of—er—phosphates."

"What are phosphates?"

"Oh, there are so many of them, you know. There is quinine, of course, and magnesium, and—and so on. Let me fill your glass."

She took one very little sip. "It isn't what I should call a pleasant wine," she said. "It stings so."

"Ah!" I said, "that's the phosphates. It would be a little like that. But that's not the way to judge a port. What you should do is to take a large mouthful and roll it round the tongue,—then you get the aroma. Look: this is the way."

I took a large mouthful.

When I had stopped coughing I said that I didn't know that there was anything absolutely wrong with the wine, but you wanted to be ready for it. It had come on me rather unexpectedly.

Eliza said that very likely that was it, and she asked me if I would care to finish my

glass now that I knew what it was like.

I said that it was not quite a fair test to try a port just after it had been shaken about. I would let the bottle stand for a day or two. Ultimately I took what was left in Eliza's glass and my own, and emptied it into the garden. I did this because I did not want our general servant to try it when she cleared away, and possibly acquire a taste for drink.

Next morning I found that two of our best geraniums had died during the night. I said that it was most inexplicable. Eliza said nothing.

A few nights afterward, Eliza asked me if I thought that the tonic port had stood long enough.

"Yes," I said; "I will decant it for you, and then if Miss Sakers calls you might say carelessly that you were just going to have a glass of port, and would be glad if she would join you."

"No, thank you," she said; "I don't want to deceive Miss Sakers."

"You could mention that it was rich in phosphates. There need be no deception about it."

"Well, then, I don't want to lose the few friends we've got."

"As you please, Eliza. It seems a pity to waste more than half a bottle of good wine."

"Bottle of what?"

"You heard what I said."

"Well, drink it yourself, if you like it."

Some weeks afterward I found the bottle of Tarret's Tonic Port still standing in the sideboard. I gave it to our servant, explaining to her that it would be best mixed with water. There was still the risk of her acquiring drinking habits, but I could think of no one else to give it to. That night Eliza found the girl crying in the kitchen. When Eliza asked what was the matter, she said that she would rather say nothing, but that

she was wishful to leave at the end of her month.

Of course Eliza blamed me, but I had told the girl as distinctly as I could speak that it was a wine which required dilution. However, Eliza persuaded her to stay on. The girl took the pledge on the following day, and seemed changed in many ways. She put the bottle back in the sideboard; there was still more than half of it left.

After that nothing happened with reference to the tonic port, until one day I noticed that our cat (who had recently lost her kittens) seemed in a poor state of health. I gave it a few spoonfuls of the tonic port in a little milk. It drank it with avidity, somewhat to my surprise. I had one or two little things to do in the garden after that, and when I came back Eliza said that the cat had become so very strange in its manner that she had thought it best to lock it in the coal-cellar.

I went to look at it, and found it lying on its back, dead. It had a singularly happy expression on its face. Both Eliza and myself were very sorry to lose it.

It had a singularly happy expression on its face.

"It had a singularly happy expression on its face."

I judged it best to say nothing about the port. But the bottle had gone from the sideboard. Eliza said that she had removed it, to prevent further accidents.

I told the head clerk about it, but he only laughed in the silliest way. He is a most ill-bred man, in my opinion.

THE GENTLEMAN OF TITLE

One of our younger clerks, a man of the name of Perkins, is said to be very well connected. He certainly spends more than his salary, and rarely wears the same trousers on two consecutive days. But I am not a snob, nor one who thinks much of these things, and I had never cultivated young Perkins. Consequently it rather surprised me when he introduced me to his friend, the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount. Then I remembered what had been said about Perkins's connections.

The Hon. Eugene Clerrimount was a handsome young man, though apparently troubled with pimples. His manner had in it what I should call dash. There was not an ounce of affectation about him; but then high rank does not need affectations—I have always noticed that. He appeared to take rather a liking to me, and insisted that we must all three go out and have a drink together. This is a thing which I really never do, but on this occasion I allowed myself to be persuaded. Not liking to mention beer, I said that I would take a glass of sherry wine. Nothing could have been more friendly and pleasing than his behaviour toward me; there was nothing at all stuck-up about him. It turned out that, after all, the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount had forgotten his purse, and Perkins happened to have no money on him; I therefore paid for the drinks, and also lent the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount half a crown for his cab; it was, indeed, quite a pleasure to do so. He thanked me warmly, and said that he should like to know me better. Might he call at my house on the following Saturday afternoon? As luck would have it, I happened to have a card on me, and presented it to him, saying that it would indeed be an honour. "Thanks," he replied, "and then I can repay you this half-sovereign, or whatever it is." "Only four shillings," I replied, "and pray do not mention it."

The Gentlemen of Title The Gentleman of Title.

Eliza was certainly less pleased than myself when she heard that the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount was coming. She said that he might be all right, or he might not, and we did not know anything about him. I replied: "One does not know anything about anybody in that rank of life. It is not necessary."

"Oh!" she said. "Isn't it? Well, I don't happen to be an earl myself."

And, really, on the Saturday morning I had the greatest difficulty to get Eliza to take a little trouble with the drawing-room, though I asked for nothing more than a thorough dusting, chrysanthemums, and the blinds up. For the tea I offered to make myself entirely responsible. There was some doubt as to whether the girl should

announce him as the Hon. Mr. Clerrimount, or the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount, or Mr. Hon. Clerrimount. "She'd better do all three, one after the other," said Eliza, snappishly. I obviated the difficulty by telling the girl, as she opened the drawing-room door, merely to say, "A gentleman to see you." I am rather one for thinking of these little ways out of difficulties.

Eliza wanted to know what time he was coming. I replied that he could not come before three or after six, because that would be against etiquette.

"Suppose he came at five minutes to three by accident," said Eliza. "Would he sit on our doorsteps until the clock struck, and then ring the bell?" I was really beginning to lose patience with Eliza.

However, by three o'clock I had Eliza in the drawing-room, with a magazine and paper-knife by her side, as if she had been reading. She was really darning socks, but they could easily be concealed in an empty art flower-pot when the front bell rang.

We sat in the drawing-room until six, but, strangely enough, the Hon. Eugene Clerrimount never came. The trifle that I had spent on the Madeira cake and macaroons was nothing, but it did wound my feelings that he had not even thought it worth while to explain his inability to keep his appointment.

And on the Monday I said to Perkins, rather sharply: "There was that matter of four shillings with your friend. I've not received the money, and I should thank you to see about it."

"What?" said Perkins. "You ask my friend and me to come and drink with you, and then want me to dun him for the money to pay for it. Well, I am blowed!"

Oh, the whole thing was most unsatisfactory and incomprehensible!

THE HAT

I had long believed that all was not right with my hat. I could prove nothing, but I had no doubt in my own mind that the girl took liberties with it. It is very easy to

brush a silk hat the wrong way, for instance, but silk hats do not brush themselves the wrong way; if it is done, some one must have done it. Morning after morning I found marks on my hat which I could not account for. Well, I said nothing, but I made up my mind to keep my eyes open. It was not only the injury to the hat—it was the impertinence to myself that affected me.

One Saturday afternoon, while I was at home, a costermonger came to the door with walnuts. The girl answered the bell, and presently I saw the coster and his cart go past the dining-room window. I don't know why it was, or how it was, but a suspicion came over me. I stepped sharply to the door, and looked out into the passage. There was no one there. The front door was open, and the kitchen door was open, and in a position between the two, against the umbrella-stand, was—something worse than ever I had expected.

I picked that hat up just as it was, with the walnuts inside it, and placed it on the dining-room table. Then I called to Eliza to come down-stairs.

"What is it?" she asked, as she entered the dining-room.

I pointed to the hat. "This kind of thing," I said, "has been going on for years!"

"Oh, do talk sense!" she said. "What do you mean?"

"Sense!" I said. "You ask me to talk sense, when I find my own hat standing on the floor in the hall, and used as a—a receptacle for walnuts!"

She smiled. "I can explain all that," she said.

"I've no doubt you can. I'm sick to death of explanations. I give ten or eleven shillings for a hat, and find it ruined. I know those explanations. You told the girl to buy the walnuts, and she had got nothing else to put them in, and the hat was handy; but if you think I take that as an excuse, you make a mistake."

"I wasn't going to say that at all."

"Or else you'll tell me that you can paste in a piece of white paper, so that the stains

on the lining won't show. Explanations, indeed!"

"And I wasn't going to say that, either."

"I don't care what you were going to say. I won't hear it. There's no explanation possible. For once I mean to take a strong line. You see that hat? I shall never wear it again!"

"I know that."

"No one shall wear it! I don't care for the expense! If you choose to let that servant-girl ruin my hat, then that hat shall be ruined, and no mistake about it!"

I picked the hat up, and gave it one sound, savage kick. My foot went through it, and the walnuts flew all over the room. At the same moment I heard from the drawing-room a faint tink-tink-tink on the piano.

I picked the hat up, and gave it one sound, savage kick.

"I picked the hat up, and gave it one sound, savage kick."

"Yes," said Eliza. "That's the piano-tuner. He came at the same time as the walnut-man, and bought those walnuts. And he put them in his hat. His hat, mind you, not your hat. Your hat's hanging up in the usual place. You might have seen it if you'd looked. Only you're——"

"Eliza," I said, "you need say no more. If that is so, the servant-girl is much less to blame than I had supposed. I have to go out now, but perhaps you'd drop into the drawing-room and explain to the tuner that there's been some slight misunderstanding with his hat. And, I say, a glass of beer and two shillings is as much as you need offer."

MY FORTUNE

The girl had just removed the supper things. We have supper rather early, because I like a long evening. "Now, Eliza," I said, "you take your work,—your sewing, or whatever it may be,—and I will take my work. Yes, I've brought it with me, and it's

to be paid as overtime. I daresay it mayn't seem much to you,—a lot of trouble, and only a few shillings to show for it, when all's said and done,—but that is the way fortunes are made, by sticking at it, by plugging into it, if I may use the term."

"The table's clear, if you want to start," said Eliza.

"Very well," I replied, and fetched my black bag from the passage to get the accounts on which I was working. I always hang the bag on the peg in the passage, just under my hat. Then it is there in the morning when and where it is wanted. Method in little things has always been rather a motto of mine.

"It has sometimes struck me, Eliza," I said, as I came back into the dining-room, with the bag in my hand, "that you do not read so much as I should like to see you read."

"Well, you asked me to take my work, and these socks are for you, and I never know what you do want."

"I did not mean that I wanted you to read at this moment. But there is one book—I cannot say exactly what the title is, and the name of the author has slipped my memory, which I should like to see in your hands occasionally, because it deals with the making of fortunes. It practically shows you how to do it."

"Did the man who wrote it make one?" asked Eliza.

"That—not knowing the name of the man—I cannot say for certain."

"Well, I should want to know that first. And aren't you going to start?"

"I can hardly start until I have unlocked my bag, and I cannot unlock my bag until I have the keys, and I cannot have the keys until I have fetched them from the bedroom. Try to be a little more reasonable."

I could not find the keys in the bedroom. Then Eliza went up, and she could not find them, either. By a sort of oversight they were in my pocket all the time. I laughingly remarked that I knew I should find them first. Eliza seemed rather pettish, the joke

being against herself.

"The reason why I mentioned that book," I said, as I unlocked the bag, "is because it points out that there are two ways of making a fortune. One is, if I may say so, my own way,—by method in little things, economy of time, doing all the work that one can get to do, and——"

"You won't get much done to-night, if you don't start soon," said Eliza.

"I do not like to be interrupted in the middle of a sentence. The other way by which you may make a fortune—well, it's not making a fortune. It's that the fortune makes you, if you understand me."

"I don't," said Eliza.

"I mean that the fortune may come of itself by luck. Luck is a very curious thing. We cannot understand it. It's of no use to talk about it, because it is quite impossible to understand it."

"Then don't let's talk about it, especially when you've got something else to do."

"Temper, temper, Eliza! You must guard against that. I was not going to talk about luck. I was going to give you an instance of luck, which happened to come within my own personal experience. It is the case of a man of the name of Chumpleigh, in our office, and would probably interest and amuse you. I do not know if I have ever mentioned Chumpleigh to you."

"Yes, you've told me all about him several times."

I might have mentioned Chumpleigh to Eliza, but I am sure that I have never told her all about him. However, I was not going to sulk, and so I told her the story again. The story would not have been so long if she hadn't interrupted me so frequently.

When I had finished, she said that it was time to go to bed, and I had wasted the evening.

I owned that possibly I had been chatting rather longer than I had intended, but I

would still get those accounts done, and sit up to do them.

"And that means extra gas," she said. "That's the way money gets wasted."

"There are many men in my place," I said, "who would refuse to sit down to work as late as this. I don't. Why? On principle. Because it's through the cultivation of the sort of thing that I cultivate one arrives at fortune. Think what fortune would mean to us. Big house, large garden, servants, carriages. I should come in from a day with the hounds, and perhaps say I felt rather done up, and would like a glass of champagne. No question of expense—not a word about it—money no object. You'd just get the bottle out of the sideboard, and I should have my glass, and they'd finish it in the kitchen, and——"

"Are you going to begin, or are you not?" asked Eliza.

"This minute," I replied, opening the black bag. I examined the contents carefully.

"Well," I said, "this is a very strange occurrence indeed—most unaccountable! I don't remember ever to have done anything of the kind before, but I seem to have forgotten to bring that work from the city. Dear me! I shall be forgetting my head next."

Eliza's reply that this would be no great loss did not seem to me to be either funny, or polite, or even true. "You strangely forget yourself," I replied, and turned the gas out sharply.

SHAKESPEARE

I led up to it, saying to Eliza, not at all in a complaining way, "Does it not seem to you a pity to let these long winter evenings run to waste?"

"Yes, dear," she replied; "I think you ought to do something."

"And you, too. Is it not so, darling?"

"There's generally some sewing, or the accounts."

"Yes; but these things do not exercise the mind."

"Accounts do."

"Not in the way I mean." I had now reached my point. "How would it be if I were to read aloud to you? I don't think you have ever heard me read aloud. You are fond of the theatre, and we cannot often afford to go. This would make up for it. There are many men who would tell you that they would sooner have a play read aloud to them than see it acted in the finest theatre in the world."

"Would they? Well—perhaps—if I were only sewing it wouldn't interrupt me much."

I said, "That is not very graciously put, Eliza. There is a certain art in reading aloud. Some have it, and some have not. I do not know if I have ever told you, but when I was a boy of twelve I won a prize for recitation, though several older boys were competing against me."

She said that I had told her before several times.

I continued: "And I suppose that I have developed since then. A man in our office once told me that he thought I should have done well on the stage. I don't know whether I ever mentioned it."

She said that I had mentioned it once or twice.

"I should have thought that you would have been glad of a little pleasure—innocent, profitable, and entertaining. However, if you think I am not capable of——"

"What do you want to read?"

"What would you like me to read?"

"Miss Sakers lent me this." She handed me a paper-covered volume, entitled, "The Murglow Mystery; or, The Stain on the Staircase."

"Trash like this is not literature," I said. However, to please her, I glanced at the first page. Half an hour later I said that I should be very sorry to read a book of that stamp out loud.

"Then why do you go on reading it to yourself?"

"Strictly speaking, I am not reading it. I am glancing at it."

When Eliza got up to go to bed, an hour afterward, she asked me if I was still glancing. I kept my temper.

"Try not to be so infernally unreasonable," I said. "If Miss Sakers lends us a book, it is discourteous not to look at it."

On the following night Eliza said that she hoped I was not going to sit up until three in the morning, wasting the gas and ruining my health, over a book that I myself had said—

"And who pays for the gas?"

"Nobody's paid last quarter's yet. Mother can't do everything, and——"

"Well, we can talk about that some other time. To-night I am going to read aloud to you a play of Shakespeare's. I wonder if you even know who Shakespeare was?"

"Of course I do."

"Could you honestly say that you have ever read one—only one—of his tragedies?"

"No. Could you?"

"I am going to read 'Macbeth' to you, trying to indicate by changes in my voice which character is speaking." I opened the book.

Eliza said that she couldn't think who it was took her scissors.

"I can't begin till you keep quiet," I said.

"It's the second pair that's gone this week."

"Very well, then," I said, shutting up the book with a bang, "I will not read aloud to you to-night at all. You may get along as you can without it."

"You're sure you didn't take those scissors for anything?" she replied, meditatively.

"Now then," I said, on the next night, "I am ready to begin. The tragedy is entitled

'Macbeth.' This is the first scene."

"What is the first scene?"

"A blasted heath."

"Well, I think you might give a civil answer to a civil question. There was no occasion to use that word."

"I didn't."

"You did. I heard it distinctly."

"Do let me explain. It's Shakespeare uses the word. I was only quoting it. It merely means——"

"Oh, if it's Shakespeare I suppose it's all right. Nobody seems to mind what he says. You can go on."

I read for some time. Eliza, in reply to my question, owned that she had enjoyed it, but she went to bed before her usual time.

When I was preparing to read aloud on the following evening, I was unable to find our copy of Shakespeare. This was very annoying, as it had been a wedding-present. Eliza said that she had found her scissors, and very likely I should find the Shakespeare some other night.

But I never did. I have half thought of buying another copy, or I dare say Eliza's mother would like to give us it. Eliza thinks not.

THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

"Eliza," I said one evening, "do you think that you are fonder of me than I am of you, or that I am fonder of you than you are of me?"

She answered, "What is thirteen from twenty-eight?" without looking up from the account-book.

"I do think," I said, "that when I speak to you you might have the civility to pay some little attention."

She replied, "One pound fifteen and two, and I hope you know where we are to get it from, for I don't. And don't bang on the table in that silly way, or you'll spill the ink."

"I did not bang. I tapped slightly from a pardonable impatience. I put a plain question to you some time ago, and I should like a plain answer to it."

"Well, what do you want to talk for when you see I am counting? Now, what is it?"

"What I asked was this. Do I think—I mean, do you think—that I am fonder of me—no, you are fonder of I—well, I'll begin again. Which of us two would you say was fonder of the other than the other was of the—dash it all, you know what I mean!"

"No, I don't, but it's nothing to swear about."

"I was not swearing. If you don't know what I mean, I'll try to put it more simply. Are you fonder than I am? There."

"Fonder of what?"

"Fonder of each other."

"You mean is each of us fonder of the other than the other is of—of the each?"

"I mean nothing of the kind. Until you muddled it the thing was perfectly clear. Well, we two are two, are we not?"

"Of course I know that, but——"

"Wait a minute. I intend that you shall understand me this time. Which of those two would you say was fonder of the other than the other was of the other, or would you say that each was as fond of the other as the other one was? Now you see it."

"Almost. Say it again."

"Would you say that in your opinion neither of us were fonder of the other than both were of each, or that one was fonder of the other than the other was of the first, and if so, which?"

"Now you've made it worse than ever. I don't believe you know what you mean yourself. Do come to supper and talk sense."

I smiled cynically as I sat down to supper. "This doesn't surprise me in the least," I remarked. "I never yet knew a woman who could argue, or even understand the first step in an argument, and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"Well," said Eliza, "you can't argue until you know what you are talking about, and I don't know what you're talking about, and you don't seem to know yourself, or, if you do, you're too muddled to tell anybody. If you want to argue, argue about one pound fifteen and two. It's Griffiths, and been sent in three times already."

"Don't shirk it, Eliza. Don't try to get away from it. I asked you which of us you thought was the fonder of the other, and you couldn't understand it."

"Why, of course, I understand that. Why didn't you say so before?"

"As far as I remember, those were my precise words."

"But they weren't! What you said was, 'If neither of us was fonder of both than each is of either, which of the two would it be?' or something of the kind."

"Now, how could I talk such absolute nonsense?"

"Ah!" she said; "when men lose their temper they never know what they're saying!"

I had a very good answer to that, but just at the moment the girl brought in the last post. There was a letter from Eliza's mother. There was also an enclosure in postal orders quite beyond anything I had expected, and she expressed a hope that they might enable us "to defray some of the expenses incidental to the season." As far as my own personal feeling is concerned, I should have returned them at once. In some ways I daresay that I am a proud man. I have been told so. But the poor old lady takes such pleasure in giving, and she has so little other enjoyment, that I should have been reluctant to check her. In fact, taking the money as evidence of her affection, I was pleased. So was Eliza.

"Pay Griffiths's twopenny-halfpenny account to-morrow," I said, "and tell him that he has lost our patronage for ever."

We did not recur to the original question. Personally, I should say that in the case of two people it might very well happen that, though at one time the affection of one for the other might be greater than the affection which the other had for the one which I originally mentioned at the same time, yet at some other time the affection which the other one had for the other might be just as much greater than the affection which the first one had for the second, as the difference was in the first instance between the two. At least, that is the general drift of what I mean. Eliza would never see it, of course.

THE DAY OFF

On the occasion of the marriage of our junior partner to Ethel Mary, only surviving daughter of William Hubblestead, Esq., J.P., of Banlingbury, by the Canon of Blockminster, assisted by the Rev. Eugene Hubblestead, cousin of the bride—on this occasion the office was closed for the whole of one day, and the staff had a holiday without deduction of salary.

The staff had presented six silver (hallmarked) nutcrackers, and a handsomely bound volume of Cowper's Poetical Works. The latter was my own suggestion; there was a sum of eight shillings over after the purchase of the nutcrackers, and I have always had a partiality for Cowper. The junior partner thanked us personally, and in very warm terms; at the same time he announced that the following Thursday was to be treated as a holiday.

The weather was glorious, and I have never had a more enjoyable day. The girl laid breakfast overnight, and we rose at half-past five. By half-past six Eliza had cut some mutton sandwiches and placed them in a basket with a bottle of milk—the milkman having obliged with a specially early call by appointment. A brief journey by train, and by a quarter-past seven we were at Danstow for our day off in the

country.

Danstow is a picturesque little village, and looked beautiful in the hot sunlight. I was wearing a fairly new summer suit, with brown boots. As I remarked to Eliza, it would probably have created a feeling of surprise among the villagers if they had learned that, as a rule, my professional duties took me to the city in the morning.

Eliza said: "All right. What do we do here?"

"Why," I said, "there's the old church. We mustn't miss that."

We went and examined the old church. Then we went twice up and down the village street, and examined that.

"Well," said Eliza, "what next?"

"Now," I replied, "we just stroll about and amuse ourselves. I feel particularly light-hearted."

"That's breakfasting at six, that is," said Eliza. "If you could find a quiet place, we might have a sandwich."

We went a little way along the road, and I espied a field which seemed to me to look likely. I said to a passer-by: "I am a stranger here. Can you tell me whether there would be any objection to our sitting in that field?" He said, in rather an offensive and sarcastic way, that he believed the field was open for sitting in about that hour. I did not give him any reply, but just opened the gate for Eliza.

We sat down under the hedge, and finished our sandwiches and milk. The church clock struck nine.

"What train do we go back by?" asked Eliza.

"Not until half-past nine to-night. There's a day for you!"

"Twelve hours and a half," said Eliza. "And we've done the sandwiches, and done the milk, and done the church, and there's nothing else to do."

"Except amuse ourselves," I added, as I took off my boots, which had pained me

slightly. I then dozed off.

Eliza woke me to say that she had read all the newspaper the sandwiches were wrapped in, and picked some wild flowers, and the flowers had died, and she wanted to know what the time was. It was just past eleven.

She said: "Oh, lor!"

I soon dropped off again.

When I woke, at half-past twelve, Eliza was not there. She returned in a few minutes, and said that she had been doing the church over again.

"That was hardly necessary," I observed.

"Oh, one must do something, and there's nothing else to do."

"On the contrary, there's luncheon. We'll have that at once, so as to give us a good long afternoon."

"The afternoon will be long enough," she said. If I had not known that she was having a day's enjoyment, I should have thought that she seemed rather dejected in her manner.

The luncheon at the village inn was not expensive. Eliza said that their idea of chops was not her idea; but all the same she seemed inclined to spin the thing out and make it last as long as possible. I deprecated this, as I felt that I could not very well take my boots off again until I had returned to the field.

"Very well, then," she said. "Only let's go back slowly."

"As slowly as you like," I replied. "It's the right boot principally; but I prefer to walk slowly."

When we had resumed our old position under the hedge, and I had removed my boots, I said:

"Now, then, I think I've earned a pipe and a short nap. You amuse yourself in any way you like."

"Do what with myself?" she asked, rather sharply.

She walked twice round the field, and then I fell off to sleep. It turned out afterward that she also did the picturesque old church for the third time, and went over a house which was to let, refusing to take it on the ground that there was no bath-room. This was rather dishonest, as she would not have taken it if there had been a bath-room, or even two bath-rooms. I would not do that kind of thing myself. I awoke about tea-time. The charge for tea at the inn was very moderate, though Eliza said that there was tea which was tea, and tea which was an insult.

Eliza found that there was a train back at half-past six, and said she was going by it, whether I did or not, because it was a pity to have too much of a good thing, and she hadn't the face to ask for the keys of that church again. I accompanied her. I fancy that the brown leather is liable to shrink in the sun, and I was not unwilling to get back to my slippers and stretch myself out on the sofa.

There is nothing like a long day in the country; quite apart from the enjoyment, you feel that it is doing you so much good. I am sorry that Eliza did not seem to enter into the spirit of the thing more.

THE MUSHROOM

We were at breakfast one morning in the summer when the girl entered rather excitedly and said that to the best of her belief there was a mushroom coming in the little lawn in front of the house. It seemed a most extraordinary thing, and Eliza and I both went out to look at it. There was certainly something white coming through the turf; the only question was, whether or not it was a mushroom. The girl seemed certain about it. "Why," she said, "in my last place mushrooms was frequent. You see, being wealthy, they had anything they fancied. If I didn't know about mushrooms, I ought to!" There is a familiarity in that girl's manner which to my mind is highly objectionable. The establishment where she was formerly employed was apparently on a scale that we do not attempt. That does not justify her, however,

in continually drawing comparisons. I shall certainly have something to say to her about it.

However, it was not about Jane that I intended to speak, but about the mushroom.

Eliza said that I ought to put a flowerpot over the mushroom, because, being visible from the road, some one might be tempted to come in and steal it. But I was too deep for that. "No," I replied, "if you put an inverted plant-pot there everybody will guess that you are hiding a mushroom underneath it. Just put a scrap of newspaper over it."

"But that might get blown away!"

"Fasten down one corner of it with a hairpin."

Eliza said that I was certainly one to think of things. I believe there is truth in that. On my way to the station I happened to meet Mr. Bungwall's gardener (a most obliging and respectful man), and had a word with him about the mushroom. He said that he would come round in the evening and have a look at it.

I was pleased to find (on my return) that the mushroom was still in the garden under the newspaper, and had increased slightly in size.

"This," I said to Eliza, "is very satisfactory."

"It would make a nice little present to send to mother," Eliza observed.

There I could not entirely agree with her. I pointed out that in a week's time I should probably be applying to her mother for a small temporary loan. I did not think it an honourable thing to attempt to influence her mind beforehand by sending a present. I wished her to approach the question of the loan purely in a business spirit. I added that I thought we would leave the mushroom to grow for one more day, and then have it for breakfast. That ultimately was decided upon.

Then Mr. Bungwall's gardener arrived, and said that he was sorry to disappoint us in any way, and it was not his fault, but the mushroom was a toadstool.

"This," I said to Eliza, "is something of a blow."

"Perhaps," she said, "Mr. Bungwall's gardener is mistaken."

"I fear not. But, however, I happened to mention about that mushroom to our head clerk this morning, and he said that he thoroughly understood mushrooms, and had made a small profit by growing them. To-morrow morning I will pick that toadstool or mushroom, as the case may be, take it up to the city, and ask him about it."

Eliza agreed that this would be the best way.

But at breakfast next morning she seemed thoughtful and somewhat depressed. I asked her what she was thinking about.

"It's like this," she said. "If your head clerk says that our toadstool is a mushroom, while Mr. Bungwall's gardener says that our mushroom is a toadstool, we sha'n't like to eat it because of Mr. Bungwall's gardener, and we sha'n't like to throw it away because of your head clerk, and I don't see what to do with it."

"You forget, my dear. We have a third opinion. Jane says the mushroom is a mushroom."

"Jane will say anything."

"Well, we might put her to the test. We might ask her if she'd like to eat the mushroom herself, and then if she says yes and seems pleased, why, of course we'd eat it. I'll go and pick it now."

And when I went to do so I found that the mushroom had gone.

Eliza says that Mr. Bungwall's gardener told us it was a toadstool to keep us from picking it, and then stole it himself, because he knew that it was a mushroom.

That may be. I should be sorry to believe it, because I have always found Mr. Bungwall's gardener such a very respectful man. To my mind there is an air of mystery over the whole affair.

THE PLEASANT SURPRISE

I had got the money by work done at home, out of office hours. It came to four pounds altogether. At first I thought I would use it to discharge a part of our debt to Eliza's mother. But it was very possible that she would send it back again, in which case the pence spent on the postal orders would be wasted, and I am not a man that wastes pennies. Also, it was not absolutely certain that she would send it back. I sent her a long letter instead—my long letters are almost her only intellectual pleasure. As for the four pounds, I reserved two for myself, for any incidental expenses, and decided to give two to Eliza. I did not mean simply to hand them to her, but to get up something in the way of a pleasant surprise.

I had tried something of the kind before. Eliza once asked me for six shillings for a new tea-tray that she had seen. I went and stood behind her chair, and said, "No, dear, I couldn't think of it," at the same time dropping the six shillings down the back of her neck. Eliza said it was a pity I couldn't give her six shillings for a tea-tray without compelling her to go up-stairs and undress at nine o'clock in the morning. It was not a success.

However, I had more than one idea in my head. This time I thought I would first find out if there was anything she wanted.

So on Sunday at tea-time I said, not as if I were meaning anything in particular, "Is there anything you want, Eliza?"

"Yes," she said; "I want a general who'll go to bed at half-past nine and get up at half-past five. If they'd only do that, that's all I ask."

"You will pardon me, Eliza," I said, "but you are not speaking correctly. You said that was all that you asked. What you meant——"

"Do you know what I meant?"

"I flatter myself that I know precisely——"

"Then if you know precisely what I meant, I must have spoken accurately."

But as we went to church I discovered that she wanted a new jacket. Her own was trimmed rabbit, and had been good, but the fur had gone bald in places.

Next morning I wrote on a sheet of note-paper, "To buy a new jacket. With your husband's love." I folded the two sovereigns up in this, and dropped the packet into the pocket of Eliza's old jacket, as it hung in the wardrobe, not telling her what I had done. My idea was that she would put on the jacket to go out shopping in the morning, and putting her hand in the pocket, get a pleasant surprise. As I was leaving for town, she asked me why I kept on smiling so mysteriously. I replied, "Perhaps you, too, will smile before the day is over."

On my return I found Eliza at the front door. "Come and look," she said, cheerfully. "I have got a pleasant surprise for you." She flung open the drawing-room door, and pointed. In the middle of the table stood a spiraea, a most handsome and graceful plant. It stood in one of the best saucers, with some coloured paper round the pot, and the general effect was very good. I at once guessed that she had bought it for me with the change from my present to her, and thought it showed very good feeling in her.

"I hope you have not given too much for this," I said.

"I didn't give any money for it."

"I don't understand."

"Well, you must know I had a present this morning."

"Of course I know."

"Did mother tell you? Yes, she has sent me a beautiful new jacket. Then a man came round with a barrow of plants, and he said he didn't want money if I had any clothes to spare. So I gave him my old worn-out jacket for this spiraea, and——"

I remembered that I had seen the man with the barrow farther down the street.

"Excuse me for one moment, Eliza," I said, and dashed out after him.

He was a big, red-faced man, and he made no difficulty about it at all.

"Yes," he said, "I bought that jacket, gov'ner, and I don't deny it. There it is at the bottom of my bundle, and I ain't even looked at it since. Nor I ain't goin' to look now. You say there was two suvreigns in the pocket. A gent like you don't want to swindle a common man like me. If you say the two suvreigns was there, then they're there now, and I can return yer two pound out o' my own, in a suttunty of gettin' 'em back out o' the jacket pocket. Bless yer! I knows an honest man when I sees one."

With these words he drew the money from his own waistcoat pocket, and handed it to me. I took it with some reluctance.

"Hadn't you better make quite certain——"

"Not a bit," says he. "If them suvreigns were there when the jacket were 'anded to me, they is there now. I could see as you was a man to be trusted, otherwise I'd 'ave undone the bundle and searched long afore this."

"What have you been doing?" said Eliza, on my return.

"Never mind. Your mother has given you a new jacket. Let me have the pleasure of giving you a new hat." I pressed the two coins into her palm.

She looked at them, and said, "You can't get a hat for a halfpenny, you know, dear. What did you rush out for just now? And why did you have these two farthings gilded? You'll be mistaking them for sovereigns, if you're not careful. Were you trying to take me in?"

I did not quite see what to say for the moment, and so I took her suggestion. I explained that it was a joke.

"You don't look much as if you were joking."

"But I was. I suppose I ought to know if any man does. However, Eliza, if you want a new hat, anything up to half a sovereign, you've only to say it."

She said it, thanked me, and asked me to come and help her water the spiraea.

"It's such a shapely spiraea," she said.

"Yes," I answered sadly, "it's a regular plant." And so it was, though I had not been intending what the French call a double entendre at the time.

THE MOPWORTHS

I must say that both Eliza and myself felt a good deal of contempt for the Mopworths. We had known them for three years, and that gave us a claim; Peter Mopworth was a connection of Eliza's by marriage, and that also gave us a claim; further, our social position gave us a claim. Nevertheless, the Mopworths were to have their annual party on the following Wednesday, and they had not invited us.

"Upon my soul," I exclaimed, "I never in my life heard of anything so absolutely paltry."

"I can't think why it is," said Eliza.

"Oh, we're not good enough for them. We all know who his father was, and we all know what he is—a petty provincial shopkeeper! A gentleman holding important employment in one of the principal mercantile firms in the city isn't good enough for him. If I'm permitted to clean his boots I'm sure I ought to be thankful. Oh, yes! Of course! No doubt!"

"You do get so sarcastic," observed Eliza.

"That's nothing—nothing to what I should be if I let myself go. But I don't choose to let myself go. I don't think he's worth it, and I don't think she's worth it either. It's a pity, perhaps, that they don't know that they're making themselves ridiculous, but it can't be helped. Personally, I sha'n't give the thing another thought."

"That's the best thing to do," said Eliza.

"Of course it is. Why trouble one's head about people of that class? And, I say, Eliza, if you meet that Mopworth woman in the street, there's no occasion for you to recognize her."

"That would look as if we were terribly cut up because we hadn't been asked to their party."

"Possibly. Whereas, I don't even consider it worth talking about."

We discussed the Mopworths and their party for another hour and a half, and then went to bed.

"Lying awake last night," I said at breakfast next morning, "I couldn't help thinking over the different things we have done for those serpents."

"What serpents?"

"Those contemptible Mopworths. I wonder if they have any feelings of shame? If they have, they must blush when they think of the way they have treated us."

"I can't think why they've left us out. Perhaps it's a mistake."

"Not a bit of it. I've been expecting this for some time. Of course he has made money. I don't say—I would rather not say—how he has made it. But it seems to have turned his head. However, after this I shall probably never mention him again."

Eliza began to talk about the weather. I told her that Mopworth had done things which, personally, I should have been very sorry to do, and that I should be reluctant to adopt his loud style of dress.

"But, of course," I added, "no gentleman ever does dress like that."

Eliza said that if I intended to catch my train I had better start.

I started.

On my return I said to Eliza that, though the whole subject was distasteful to me, there was one point to which I had given a few moments' consideration. Reluctant though I was to sully my lips with the name of Mopworth, I felt it a duty to myself to say that even if the Mopworths had asked us to their annual party I should have refused point-blank.

"Really?" said Eliza. This annoyed me slightly. She ought to have seen, without

being told, that it was impossible for people like us to continue to know people like them.

"I am accustomed," I replied, "to say just exactly what I mean. As far as I can remember, I have lately more than once asked you to drop the Mopworths. If I have not actually done it, it has been in my mind to do so. They are connected to us by marriage, and I am not unduly proud, but still I feel that we must draw the line somewhere. I do not care to have Mopworth bragging about the place that he is on intimate terms with us."

"Well," said Eliza, "there aren't such a lot of people who ever ask us to anything. Miss Sakers is friendly, of course, especially when there are subscriptions on for the bazaar or the new organ, but she doesn't carry it to that point."

"Quite so," I said, "and I'm by no means certain about Miss Sakers. She may be all right. I hope she is. But I candidly confess that I by no means like her manner."

At this moment the girl brought in a note, delivered by hand, from Mrs. Mopworth. It said that she had sent an invitation to Eliza but had had no reply. She felt so certain that the invitation must have been delayed in the post (which was not surprising, considering the season), that she had ventured to write again, though it might be against etiquette. She hoped that we should both be able to come, and said that on the previous occasion I had been the life and soul of the party.

"Well," I said, "Eliza, what would you like to do?"

"Oh, I'm going!" she replied.

"Then if you insist, I shall go with you. I've never had a word to say against Mrs. Mopworth. It is true that he is not in every particular what—well, what I should care to be myself. Possibly he has not had my advantages. I do not want to judge him too harshly. My dress clothes are put away with my summer suit in the second drawer in the box-room. Just put them to the fire to get the creases out. And, Eliza, write a friendly note to Mrs. Mopworth, implying that we had never heard of the party. I

saw from the first that the omission was a mistake."

Eliza went away smiling. Women are so variable.

THE PEN-WIPER

Eliza always works me some little pretty trifle for my birthday, and always has done so since the day when I led her to the hymeneal altar. But it is not done at all as a matter of course. During the days before my birthday, when she is working at the present, she keeps a clean handkerchief by her side, and flings it over the work to hide it when I enter the room. This makes it more of a surprise when the day comes. As a rule, I whistle a few bars in a careless way before entering the room, so as to give her plenty of time to get the work under the handkerchief. There is no definite arrangement about this. I merely do what good taste dictates. Last year, instead of the handkerchief, she kept a large table-napkin by her side when she was working. However, though I did not tell her so, this let the secret out. I knew that she must be doing me a pair of slippers.

This year, on my birthday, when I came down to breakfast, I found placed before me the hot-water plate with the tin cover to it—a very useful article when there happens to be an invalid in the house.

Eliza, bending down behind the tea-cosy to hide her smile, told me to be quick with my breakfast, in rather a censorious voice. I lifted the tin cover, and there on the plate was the pen-wiper which Eliza had made for me.

This rather graceful and amusing way of giving a present is not really Eliza's own invention. I did it some years ago when I gave her a pincushion. As the pincushion was made to imitate a poached egg (and really very like), perhaps the humour in that instance had rather more point. However, I do not say this at all to find fault with Eliza. I am rather one to think of novelties, and if Eliza cares to copy any of them, so much the better.

The top and bottom of the pen-wiper which Eliza had made for me were of black

velvet, which always has a handsome look to my mind. On the top was worked in gold beads, "Kindly clean the pen." The interior was composed of several folds of very pale shades of art muslin. Only the day before Messrs. Howlett & Bast had refused to send any more patterns, as the last lot sent had not been returned, though twice applied for. I understood that now.

However, it made a very good pen-wiper, in pleasant, simple taste, and I thanked Eliza for it several times most warmly. At my suggestion it was placed on the centre-table in the drawing-room. One never wrote there, but it seemed naturally to belong to the drawing-room.

So far, my birthday had gone happily enough. In the evening, when I returned from the city, I sat down to write a short, sharp note to Messrs. Howlett & Bast. I explained to them that by their impertinence they were running a grave risk of entirely losing my custom, and suggested to them that the lot of patterns to which they referred might very possibly have been lost in the post.

When I had finished the letter, I wiped my pen on the inside of my coat. This is my general custom. Some men wipe their pens on their hair,—not a very cleanly habit, in my opinion,—besides, unless the colour of the hair is exceptionally dark, the ink shows.

I had no sooner wiped my pen on the inside of my coat than I remembered Eliza's present. Determined to show her that I appreciated it, I took a full dip of ink, stepped into the drawing-room, and wiped the pen on the new pen-wiper. Then I called up-stairs: "Eliza, I have just found your present very useful. Would you like to come and look?" She happened to be fastening something up the back at the time, but she came down a minute afterward.

She picked up the pen-wiper, looked at it, exclaimed "Ruined!" and then walked rapidly out of the room. I followed her, and asked what was the matter.

It appeared that the words, "Kindly clean the pen," meant that the pen was to be

cleaned on a scrap of paper before the pen-wiper was used. Eliza said that I might have known that the pretty muslin was not intended to be a perfect mess of ink.

"Well," I said, "I didn't know. That's all there is to say about it."

But it was not, apparently, all that there was to say about it. In fact, the whole thing cast an unpleasant shade over the evening of my birthday. Finally I took a strong line, and refused to speak at all.

THE 9.43

In the course of conversation on Saturday evening it had transpired that Eliza had never been in St. Paul's Cathedral. "Then," I said, "you shall go there to-morrow morning; I will take you."

"I'm sure I'm agreeable," said Eliza.

On the Sunday morning one or two little things had happened to put me out. At breakfast I had occasion to say that the eggs were stone-cold, and Eliza contradicted me. It was very absurd of her. As I pointed out to her, what earthly motive could I have for saying that an egg was cold if it was not? What should I gain by it? Of course she had no answer—that is, no reasonable answer. Then after breakfast I broke my boot-lace in two places. No, I was not angry. I hope I can keep my temper as well as most men. But I was in a state of mind bordering on the irritable.

Eliza came down-stairs, dressed for going out, asked me why I was not ready, and said we should miss the 9.43.

"Indeed!" said I. "And what, precisely, might you mean by the 9.43?"

"I mean, precisely, the train which leaves here for the city at seventeen minutes to ten."

"One of your usual mistakes," I replied. "The train is 9.53, and not 9.43."

"Have you a time-table?" she asked.

"No."

"Because if you had a time-table I could show you that you are wrong. Why, I know it's the 9.43."

"If I had a time-table I could show you most certainly that it is the 9.53. Not that you'd believe it, even then. You're too obstinate, Eliza—too certain of yourself!"

"Look here!" I observed, after she had argued that point at some length, "let us come back to the original subject of discussion. Which of us travels most to and from London? That is the reasonable way to settle it."

"You do, on week-days. But you never go on Sundays, and the Sunday trains are different."

"I am fully aware of the difference. Every day I am thrown into constant contact with the time-tables. Only last night I was looking at them at the station. As far as I know, my memory is not going."

"No more is mine."

"Really? A week ago I purchased and brought home six new collars. They are not marked. Why? Because you forgot them! At this very moment that I am speaking to you I am wearing an unmarked collar."

"Yes; but I only forgot them one day."

"Then why did you not mark them on the other days?"

"Because on the other days you forgot to bring home the marking-ink."

"'M, yes," I said. "In a sense that is true. I have my own business to attend to in the city without always thinking about marking-ink. But what has that got to do with it? And why bring it in? We are not talking about marking-ink; we are talking about trains!"

She said that I began it, and of course I pointed out to her that I had done nothing of the kind.

We argued for some little time as to which of us had begun it, and then Eliza said, in

her spiteful way—

"We are not talking about which of us began it; we are talking about trains!"

"It's very little use talking to you about trains. I know you're wrong! I would stake my life, cheerfully, that it is 9.53, and not 9.43. But you'd never own you're wrong; you're too obstinate for that!"

"Of course I don't own I'm wrong, because I'm not wrong! That would be silly!" she added, reflectively. "Even if it was 9.53, I shouldn't be wrong. All I said was, that we should miss the 9.43. Well, if there is no 9.43, we cannot catch it; and what you don't catch, you miss!"

"Absurd nonsense! If you do not catch scarlet fever, you do not say that you miss it!"

She replied: "We are not talking about scarlet fever; we are talking about trains!"

"Bah!" I exclaimed. I should have added more, but at this moment the clock on the dining-room mantelpiece struck ten.

THE CONUNDRUMS

I had bought the little book at the station stall, and it seemed to be very well worth the sixpence which I paid for it. It was entitled "Everybody's Book of Bright and Original Conundrums." Of course I had an idea in my head in buying the book; I am not the man to throw away my money to no purpose. I thought that these conundrums would be not only a pleasant amusement, but also a valuable intellectual exercise to Eliza and myself during the winter evenings. Then we could use them for social purposes during the Christmas party season. I do not know how it may be with others, but I have often found, when introduced to a lady, that I have said "Good evening," and then had absolutely nothing else to say. With the help of the conundrum book I would fill in any awkward pause by asking her who was the most amiable king in history. That would break the ice. Besides, if we kept the book reasonably clean, it might afterward make a very serviceable and acceptable present

to Eliza's mother. I generally know pretty well what I am doing, I think. I looked at two or three of the conundrums on the way home. There was one which I do not remember precisely, but remarkably clever—something about training the shoot and shooting the train. I often wonder who it is who thinks of these things.

I was, perhaps, rather unfortunate in the evening when I brought the book home. Something may have occurred to put Eliza out; she was inclined to be quite sharp with me. I asked her, gaily, in the passage when I came in, "Can you tell me, dearest, the difference between a camel and a corkscrew? If not, here is a little volume which will inform you."

"Oh, yes! One's used for drawing corks, and the other isn't. You needn't have wasted sixpence on a rubbishy book to tell me that."

"But your answer is not the correct one," I replied. "The correct answer contains a joke. Think again."

"Well, I can't, then. I've got the wash to count."

I said that the wash could wait, but she would not appear to hear me, and went off up-stairs.

At supper I took occasion to say:

"You answered me very tartly when I asked you this afternoon for the difference between a camel and a corkscrew. Perhaps you would not have done so had you known that I bought that book with the intention of sending it as a present to your mother."

"Do you think ma would care about it?"

"I think it would cheer her lonely hours. There are upwards of a thousand conundrums in the book. I have only read twelve, but I found them all exceedingly amusing, and, at the same time, perfectly refined."

"Well, I don't see the good of them."

"They are an intellectual exercise, if you try to guess the right answer."

"I don't believe anybody ever did or ever will guess the right answer."

"If I had time," I said, "I believe I could generally think out a witty answer myself. I do not want to boast, but I believe so."

"Very well, then," said Eliza, snatching up the book and opening it at random, "here's one for you. 'If a lady slipped down the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral, what would she say?' Give me the answer to that."

"I will try to," I replied.

Now, just at the moment when Eliza put the question I felt that I had really got the answer, and then it seemed to pass away from me. Later in the evening I was certainly on the right track, when Eliza dropped her scissors, and the noise again put me off. I spent a very poor night; the answer kept sort of coming and going. Just as I was dropping off to sleep, I seemed to have thought of the answer, and then I would wake up to be sure of it, and find it had slipped me again.

As I was leaving the office, in the evening, after thinking till my head ached without arriving at any result, I put the question to one of our clerks. I thought he might possibly know.

"No," he said, "I don't know what a lady would say if she slipped down those steps. I could make a fair guess at what a man would say, if that's any good to you." Of course it was not.

So, on my return home, I told Eliza that I had not had enough time to spare to think of the answer, and I should be glad to know where she had put the book.

"Oh, I sent that to mother!" she said. "I thought you wanted it sent."

"You might have waited until you knew whether I had finished with it. But, however, what was the answer to that silly riddle?"

"The one about St. Paul's Cathedral? That wasn't in the book at all. I made up the

question out of my own head for fun."

"Then," I replied, "all I can say is, that your idea of fun is not mine. It seems to me to be acting a lie. It was not a conundrum at all."

"It would have been if you could have thought of an answer."

"Say no more," I replied, coldly. "I prefer to drop the subject."

THE INK

The ink-pot contained a shallow sediment, with short hairs, grit, and a little moisture in it. It came out on the pen in chunks. When I had spoiled the second postcard, Eliza said I was not to talk like that.

"Very well, then," I said, "why don't you have the ink-pot refilled? I'm not made of postcards, and I hate waste."

She replied that anybody would think I was made of something to hear me talk. I thought I had never heard a poorer retort, and told her so. I did not stay to argue it further, as I had to be off to the city. On my return I found the ink-pot full. "This," I thought to myself, "is very nice of Eliza." I had a letter I wanted to write, and sat down to it.

I wrote one word, and it came out a delicate pale gray. I called Eliza at once. I was never quieter in my manner, and it was absurd of her to say that I needn't howl the house down.

"We will not discuss that," I replied. "Just now I sat down to write a letter——"

"What do you want to write letters for now? You might just as well have done them at the office."

I shrugged my shoulders in a Continental manner. "You are probably not aware that I was writing to your own mother. She has so few pleasures. If you do not feel rebuked now——"

"I don't think mamma will lend you any more if you do write."

"We will not enter into that. Why did you fill the ink-pot with water?"

"I didn't."

"Then who did?"

"Nobody did. I didn't think of it until tea-time, and then—well, the tea was there."

I once read a story where a man laughed a low, mirthless laugh. The laugh came to me quite naturally on this occasion. "Say no more," I said. "This is contemptible. Now I forbid you to get the ink—I will get it myself."

On the following night she asked me if I had bought that ink. I replied, "No, Eliza; it has been an exceptionally busy day, and I have not had the time."

"I thought you had forgotten it, perhaps."

"I supposed you would say that," I said. "In you it does not surprise me."

A week later Eliza said that she wanted to do her accounts. "I am glad of that," I said. "Now you will know the misery of living without ink in the house."

"No, I sha'n't," she said, "because I always do my accounts in pencil."

"About three months ago I asked you to fill that ink-pot with ink. Why is it not done?"

"Because you also definitely forbade me to get any ink to fill it with. And you said you'd get it yourself. And it wasn't three months ago."

"I always knew you could not argue, Eliza," I replied. "But I am sorry to see that your memory is failing you as well."

On the next day I bought a penny bottle of ink and left it behind me in an omnibus. There was another bottle (this must have been a week later) which I bought, but dropped on the pavement, where it broke. I did not mention these things to Eliza, but I asked her how much longer she was going to cast a shade over our married life by neglecting to fill the ink-pot.

"Why," she said, "that has been done days and days ago! How can you be so

unjust?"

It was as she had said. I made up my mind at once to write to Eliza's mother—who, rightly or wrongly, considers that I have a talent for letter-writing. I felt happier now than I had done for some time, and made up my mind to tell Eliza that I had forgiven her. I wrote a long, cheerful letter to her mother, and thought I would show it to Eliza before I posted it. I called up-stairs to her, "Come down, darling, and see what I've done."

Then I sat down again, and knocked the ink-pot over. The ink covered the letter, the table, my clothes, and the carpet; a black stream of it wandered away looking for something else to spoil.

Then Eliza came down and saw what I had done. To this day she cannot see that it was partly her own fault. The bottle, of course, was too full.

THE PUBLIC SCANDAL

I am not a landlord. It suits my purpose better, and is in every way more convenient, to rent a small house on a yearly agreement. But if I were a landlord, I would not allow any tenant of mine to do anything that tended to undermine and honeycomb the gentility of the district. I should take a very short method with such a tenant. I should say to him or her: "Now, then, either this stops, or you go out this instant." That would settle it. However, I am not a landlord.

Even as a tenant I take a very natural interest in the district in which I live. I chose the district carefully, because it was residential, and not commercial. The houses are not very large, and they might be more solidly built, but they are not shops. They have electric bells, and small strips of garden, and a generally genteel appearance. Two of the houses in Arthur Street are occupied by piano-tuners, and bear brass plates. I do not object to that. Piano-tuning is a profession, and I suppose that, in a way, I should be considered a professional man myself. Nor do I object to the letting of apartments, as long as it is done modestly, and without large, vulgar

notice-boards. But the general tone of the district is good, and I do most strongly object to anything which would tend to lower it.

It was, as far as I remember, on the Tuesday evening that Eliza rather lost her temper about the hairpins, and said that if I kept on taking them and taking them she did not see how she was to do her hair at all.

This seemed to me rather unjust. I had not taken the hairpins for my own pleasure. The fact is that the waste-pipe from the kitchen sink frequently gets blocked, and a hairpin will often do it when nothing else will. I replied coldly, but without temper, that in future I would have hairpins of my own.

She said: "What nonsense!"

At this I rose, and went up-stairs to bed.

I think that most people who know me know that I am a man of my word. On the following morning, before breakfast, I went into the High Street to buy a pennyworth of hairpins. The short cut from our road into the High Street is down Bloodstone Terrace.

It was in Bloodstone Terrace that I witnessed a sight which pained and surprised me very much. It disgusted me. It was a disgrace to the district, and amounted to a public scandal. St. Augustine's—which is the third house in the terrace—had taken in washing, and not only had taken in washing, but were using their front garden as a drying-ground! An offensive thing of that kind makes my blood boil.

"Eliza," I said, as I brushed my hat preparatory to leaving for the city, "I intend to write to Mr. Hamilton to-day."

"Have you got the money, then?" Eliza asked, eagerly.

"If you refer to last quarter's rent, I do not mean to forward it immediately. A certain amount of credit is usual between landlord and tenant. An established firm of agents like Hamilton & Bland must know that."

"Yesterday was the third time they've written for the money, anyhow, and you can say what you like. What are you writing for, then?"

"I have a complaint to make."

"Well, I wouldn't make any complaints until I'd paid last quarter, if I were you. They'll only turn you out."

"I think not. I make the complaint in their interest. When a tenant in Bloodstone Terrace is acting in a way calculated to bring the whole neighbourhood into disrepute, and depreciate the value of house property, the agents would probably be glad to hear of it."

"Well, you're missing your train. You run off, and don't write any letters until to-night. Then you can talk about it, if you like."

In the evening, at supper, Eliza said she had been down Bloodstone Terrace, and could not see what I was making all the fuss about.

"It is simply this," I said. "St. Augustine's is converted into a laundry, and the front garden used as a drying-ground in a way that, to my mind, is not decent."

"Yes," said Eliza, "that's Mrs. Pedder. The poor woman has to do something for her living. She's just started, and only got one job at present. It would be cruel——"

"Not at all. Let her wash, if she must wash, but let her wash somewhere else. I cannot have these offensive rags flapping in my face when I walk down the street."

"They're not offensive rags. I'm most particular about your things."

"What do you mean?"

"It's your things that she washes. I thought I'd give her a start."

I dashed off half a glass of beer, put the glass down with a bang, and flung myself back in the chair without a word.

"Don't behave in that silly way," said Eliza. "She's a halfpenny cheaper on the shirt than the last woman."

"You need not mention that," I replied. "In any case I shall not complain now. I must bear the burden of any mistakes that you make. I am well aware of it."

"I'll tell her to hang them out at the back in future."

"She can hang them where she pleases. I suppose I can bear it. It's only one more trial to bear. One thing goes after another."

"On the contrary," said Eliza, "she's never lost as much as a collar. There's a smut on your nose."

"It can stop there," I said, moodily, and went out into the garden.

THE "CHRISTIAN MARTYR"

The "Christian Martyr" was what is called an engraving, and a very tasteful thing, too, besides being the largest picture we had. It represented a young woman, drowned, floating down a river by night, with her hands tied, and a very pleasing expression on her face. With the frame (maple, and a gilt border inside) it came to three-and-six. I bought it in the Edgware Road on my own responsibility, and carried it home. I thought Eliza would like it, and she did.

"Poor thing!" she said. "You can see she must have been a lady, too. But frightfully dusty!"

"You can't get everything for three-and-six. If you'd been under the counter in a dirty little——"

"Well, all right! I wasn't complaining; but I like things clean." And she took the "Christian Martyr" into the kitchen.

"Where did you mean to put it?" asked Eliza.

"The only good place would be between 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and 'The Stag at Bay.'"

"What! In the dining-room?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I shouldn't," said Eliza. "It's a sacred subject, and we use the drawing-room on Sundays. That's the place."

"I think I can trust my own taste," I said. I got a brass-headed nail and a hammer, and began. Eliza said afterward that she had known the chair would break before ever I stood on it.

"Then you might have mentioned it," I said, coldly. "However, you shall learn that when I have made up my mind to do a thing, I do it." I rang the bell, and told the girl to fetch the steps.

I hung the "Christian Martyr," and was very pleased with the effect. The whole room looked brighter and more cheerful. I asked Eliza what she thought, and she answered, as I expected, that the picture ought to have been in the drawing-room.

"Eliza," I said, "there is one little fault which you should try to correct. It is pigheadedness."

At breakfast next morning the picture was all crooked. I put it straight. Then the girl brought in the bacon, rubbed against the picture, and put it crooked again. I put it straight again, and sat down. The girl, in passing out, put it crooked once more.

"Really," I said to Eliza, "this is a little too much!"

"Then put some of it back."

"I was not referring to what I have on my plate, but to that girl's conduct. I don't buy 'Christian Martyrs' for her to treat them in that way, and I think you should speak about it."

"She can't get past without rubbing against it. You've put it so low. I said it would be better in the drawing-room."

As usual, I kept my temper.

"Eliza," I said, "have you already forgotten what I told you last night? We all of us—even the best of us—have our faults, but surely——"

"While you're talking you're missing your train," she said.

On my return from the city I went into the dining-room and found the picture gone. Eliza was sitting there as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"Where is the 'Christian Martyr'?" I asked.

"On the sofa in the drawing-room. You said yourself that it was only in the way in here. I thought you might like to hang it there."

"I am not angry," I said, "but I am pained." Then I fetched the "Christian Martyr" and put it in its old place.

"You are a funny man," said Eliza; "I never know what you want."

As we were going up to bed that night we heard a loud bang in the dining-room. The "Christian Martyr" was lying on the floor with the glass broken. It had also smashed a Japanese teapot.

"I wish you'd never bought any 'Christian Martyr,'" said Eliza. "If we'd had a mad bull in the place it couldn't have been worse. I'm sure I'm not going to buy a new glass for it."

So next day I bought a new glass myself in the city, and brought it back with me. But apparently Eliza had changed her mind, for a new glass had already been fitted in, and it was hanging in the dining-room, just where it had been before.

As a reward to Eliza I took it down and put it up in the drawing-room. She smiled in a curious sort of way that I did not quite like. But I thought it best to say nothing more about it.

THE PAGRAMS

Properly speaking, we had quarrelled with the Pagrams.

We both lived in the same street, and Pagram is in the same office as myself. For some time we were on terms. Then one night they looked in to borrow—well, I forget now precisely what it was, but they looked in to borrow something. A month

afterward, as they had not returned it, we sent round to ask. Mrs. Pagram replied that it had already been returned, and Pagram—this was the damning thing—told me at the office in so many words that they had never borrowed it. Now, I hate anything like deception. So does Eliza. For two years or more Eliza and Mrs. Pagram have met in the street without taking the least notice of each other. I speak to Pagram in the office—being, as you might say, more or less paid to speak to him. But outside we have nothing to do with each other.

It was on Wednesday morning, I think, at breakfast, that Eliza said:

"I've just heard from Jane, who had it from the milkman—Mrs. Pagram had a baby born last night."

"Well, that," I observed, "is of no earthly interest to us."

"Of course it isn't. I only just mentioned it."

"Is it a boy or girl?"

"A girl. I only hope she will bring it up to speak the truth."

I replied that she might hope what we did not expect. So far Eliza had taken just exactly the tone that I wanted. But as I watched her, I saw her expression change and her underlip pulled down on one side, as it were.

"Well," I said rather sharply, "what is it? These people are nothing to us."

"No. But—it reminded me—our little girl—my baby—that died. And I——"

Here she put down her knife and fork, got up, and walked to the window. There she stood, with her back to me.

I had a mind to speak to her about the foolishness of recalling what must be very upsetting to her. But I said nothing, and began to brush my silk hat briskly. It was about time that I was starting for the city.

I went out.

Then I came back, kissed Eliza, and went out again.

I was a little surprised to find Pagram at the office.

"I should have thought you'd have taken a day off," I said.

"Can't afford that just now," he replied, in rather a surly way.

"All well at home?"

"No."

"By my watch," I said, "that office clock's five minutes slow. What do you make it?"

"Don't know. Left my watch at home."

I had noticed that he was not wearing his watch. Later in the day I had some more conversation with him. He is quite my subordinate at the office, and I really don't know why I should have taken so much notice of him.

When I came back that night I was in two minds whether to tell Eliza or not. She hates anything like extravagance, and if I told her I felt sure she would be displeased. At the same time, if I did not tell her, and she found it out afterward, she would be still more displeased. However, I decided to say nothing about it. I was a little nervous on the point, and I own that my conscience reproached me.

As I came into the hall, Eliza came down the staircase. She was dressed for going out, and had a basket in her hand. She said: "I want you to let me go over to the Pagrams to see if I can do anything. She and the baby are both very ill,—the nurse has had no sleep,—they've no one else to help them. And—and I'm going!"

"Now, do you think this is necessary, Eliza?" I began. "When you come to consider the position we've taken up with regard to the Pagrams for two years, and the scandalous way in which they——"

Here I stopped. The hall door was shut, and Eliza had gone, and it was not worth while to continue.

"Now," I thought to myself, "it's ten to one that Eliza finds me out, and if she does, she'll probably make herself unpleasant." However, I determined not to trouble

myself about it. If it came to that, I flattered myself that I could make myself as unpleasant as most people when any occasion arose.

It was hours before Eliza returned. She burst into the room and said, "They're both better, and the baby's a beauty, and I'm to go back to-morrow afternoon."

"Indeed!" I said. "I don't know that you're not going a little too far with these people."

"Do you think so? I've found you out. You didn't tell me, but Pagram did. You lent him three pounds this morning. We can't afford that."

"Well, well," I said; "I've managed to get some overtime work, to begin next week. That—that'll come out all right. You ought to leave these business matters to me. Anyhow, it's no good finding fault, and——"

"Does Pagram generally return what's lent?"

I lost my temper and said that I didn't care a damn! And then—just then—I saw that she was not really displeased about it.

"Why," she said, "you silly! I'm glad you did it. The poor things were at their wits' end, and had got—they'd got nothing! You've saved them, and I never have liked anything you've done half as much as this."

Here Eliza burst into tears—which is really very unusual with her.

PROMOTION

How true it is, as one of our English poets has remarked, that it is always darkest before the silver lining!

While this little work was actually in the hands of the printers, an incident occurred of such great and far-reaching importance that I cannot refrain from making it the subject of an additional paper. I can give it in one word—promotion.

It came at a time when I was suffering from great depression and considerable irritation, as I have already indicated in my opening remark. It was on a Wednesday

morning, and those who know me know that invariably on Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday I put on a clean shirt. The number may seem excessive, and perhaps out of proportion to my income, but I own without shame that I am careful as to my personal appearance. I must also add that I am very particularly careful—and, I think, rightly—on the question of the airing of linen.

All I said was that I should put on that shirt, whether Eliza liked it or not, and that it would probably give me my death; but that it did not matter, and perhaps the sooner it was all over the better. There were circumstances under which life was hardly worth living, and when one's express injunctions were continually disregarded, one began to despair.

Eliza spoke quite snappishly, and said that my linen was always properly aired, and that I was too fussy.

I replied, without losing my temper, that there was airing and airing. Even now I cannot think that Eliza was either just or accurate.

At breakfast-time one or two other little circumstances occurred to put me out. A teacup which is filled so full that it overflows into the saucer is a perfect thorn in the flesh to me. So is bacon which is burnt to a cinder. I hardly did more than mention it, but Eliza seemed put out; she said I did nothing but find fault, and as for the bacon, I had better go into the kitchen and find fault with the girl, for it was the girl who had cooked it.

"On the contrary," I said, "in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred when a servant does wrong it is her mistress who deserves the censure."

"Go it!" said Eliza, an expression which I do not think to be quite ladylike. "And if a hansom-cab runs over you in Oxford Street, you go and get the damages out of the Shah of Persia. That's the line to take."

This answer exasperated me by its silliness, and I had quite made up my mind not to say another word of any kind during breakfast. Indeed, but for the fact that I had not

quite finished my bacon and that I hate waste, I should have got up and walked out of the room there and then.

A little later I happened to look up, and it struck me from Eliza's face that she might be going to cry. I therefore made a point of saying that the butter was better than we had been having lately, and that it looked like being a fine day after all. Anything like weakness is repellent to me, but still, when one sees that one's words have gone home, one is justified in not pressing the matter further.

Still, I am prepared to own that I started for the city in but low spirits, and with no inclination to join in the frivolous conversation that was going on in the railway carriage. On arriving at the office I was surprised to find that Figgis, our head clerk, was not there. He gave me the tonic port, and was inclined to be dictatorial, but I must confess that he was always a most punctual man. I was very much surprised.

Our senior partner, Mr. Bagshaw, came much earlier than usual,—10.30, to be precise,—and sent for me at once. He is a big, fat man; he speaks in short sentences, and breathes hard in between them. At the moment of entering his room I was as certain that I was about to be sacked as I have ever been of anything that I did not really know. I was wrong.

He made me sit down, glared at me, and began:

"Yesterday evening we detained Mr. Figgis for a few minutes. At the end of our interview with him he left this office for ever, never to return—never!"

I said that I was very much astonished.

"We weren't. We've known there was a leakage. People knew what we were doing—people who oughtn't to know. He sold information. We put on detectives. They proved it. See?"

I said that I saw.

"So you've got Figgis's place for the future. See?"

At that moment you might have knocked me down with a feather; it was so absolutely unexpected. Give me time, and I think I can provide a few well-chosen words suitable to the occasion as well as any man. But now I could think of nothing to say but "Thank you."

He went on to explain that this would mean an immediate rise of £75, and a prospective rise of a further £75 at the end of a year if my work was satisfactory. He said that I had not Figgis's abilities, of course, but that a very close eye had been kept on me lately, and I had shown myself to be honest, methodical, and careful in details. It was also believed that I should realize the importance of a responsible and confidential position, and that I should keep the men under me up to the mark.

The rest of our conversation was concerned with my new duties, and at the close of it he handed me Figgis's keys—my own name and the office address had been already put on the label.

I should not be fair to myself if I did not make some reference to Mr. Bagshaw's comparison of Figgis's abilities and my own. I will merely state the fact that on more than one occasion Figgis has gained success or avoided failure from suggestions made to him by myself. That he did not give me the credit for this with the firm is precisely what I should have expected from a man of that character. However, I have my opportunity now, and the firm will see.

When I returned to the clerks' office I found one of the juniors playing the fool.

"I wish you'd stop that, please," I said, "and get on with your work."

"Who gave you the right to give orders here?" he asked me, rudely.

Fortunately, that was what I had expected he would say, and therefore I had my answer ready:

"Mr. Bagshaw did, three minutes ago, when he made me head of this department in place of Mr. Figgis."

And without another word I went calmly to Mr. Figgis's desk and unlocked it. The effect was remarkable, and gave me great pleasure. During the luncheon hour I received several congratulations, and was pressed to partake of liquor. But I had long ago made up my mind that if the firm ever did place me in a good and responsible position, I would give up alcohol during business hours altogether. I carried out that resolution, and shall continue to do so; Figgis, with all his so-called abilities, was frequently drowsy in the afternoon. Apart from that, I hope I was not wanting in geniality. I snatched a few moments to telegraph to Eliza: "Meet train to-night. Very good news for you."

On my way to the station I purchased a small bottle of champagne,—it cost half a crown, but the price for this wine is always pretty stiff. I also took back with me in my bag a tinned tongue and some pears.

Eliza was waiting for me, and was obviously excited. She had guessed what had happened.

"Got Figgis's berth?" she said.

"Yes. Let's get off the platform as soon as we can. Everybody's looking at us."

We walked home very quickly, Eliza asking questions all the way, and looking, as I noticed, quite five years younger. After what I have said as to my purchases, I need not add that supper that night was a perfect banquet.

We had a long discussion as to our future, and did not get to bed until past eleven. I was at first in favour of taking a rather better house, but Eliza thought we should do more wisely to spread the money over making ourselves more comfortable generally. When she came to go into it in detail, I found that on the whole hers was the preferable course. New curtains for the drawing-room are to be put in hand at once. The charwoman is to come regularly once a week. We raised the girl's wages a pound, and she went into hysterics. Eliza has insisted that I am to have a first-class season-ticket in future. There is much can be done with £75.

On the whole, about the happiest evening of my life.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ELIZA ***

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