Love Among the Chickens

by P. G. Wodehouse

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Title: Love Among the Chickens

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Illustrator: Armand Both

Release date: February 6, 2007 [eBook #20532]

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20532

Credits: Produced by Suzanne Shell, Arthur Robinson, Sankar Viswanathan, and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE AMONG THE CHICKENS ***

"Never mind the ink, old horse. It'll soak in." "Never mind the ink, old horse. It'll soak in."

Frront Page

LOVE AMONG THE CHICKENS

A STORY OF THE HAPS AND MISHAPS ON AN ENGLISH CHICKEN FARM

By P. G. WODEHOUSE

Seal

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ARMAND BOTH

NEW YORK

THE CIRCLE PUBLISHING COMPANY

1909

Seal

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A LETTER with a POSTSCRIPT

Chap_1

M

r. Jeremy Garnet stood with his back to the empty grate—for the time was summer—watching with a jaundiced eye the removal of his breakfast things.

"Mrs. Medley," he said.

"Sir?"

"Would it bore you if I became auto-biographical?"

"Sir?"

"Never mind. I merely wish to sketch for your benefit a portion of my life's history. At eleven o'clock last night I went to bed, and at once sank into a dreamless sleep. About four hours later there was a clattering on the stairs which shook the house like

a jelly. It was the gentleman in the top room—I forget his name—returning to roost. He was humming a patriotic song. A little while later there were a couple of loud crashes. He had removed his boots. All this while snatches of the patriotic song came to me through the ceiling of my bedroom. At about four-thirty there was a lull, and I managed to get to sleep again. I wish when you see that gentleman, Mrs. Medley, you would give him my compliments, and ask him if he could shorten his program another night. He might cut out the song, for a start."

"He's a very young gentleman, sir," said Mrs. Medley, in vague defense of her top room.

"And it's highly improbable," said Garnet, "that he will ever grow old, if he repeats his last night's performance. I have no wish to shed blood wantonly, but there are moments when one must lay aside one's personal prejudices, and act for the good of the race. A man who hums patriotic songs at four o'clock in the morning doesn't seem to me to fit into the scheme of universal happiness. So you will mention it to him, won't you?"

"Very well, sir," said Mrs. Medley, placidly.

On the strength of the fact that he wrote for the newspapers and had published two novels, Mrs. Medley regarded Mr. Garnet as an eccentric individual who had to be humored. Whatever he did or said filled her with a mild amusement. She received his daily harangues in the same spirit as that in which a nurse listens to the outpourings of the family baby. She was surprised when he said anything sensible enough for her to understand.

His table being clear of breakfast and his room free from disturbing influences, the exhilaration caused by his chat with his landlady left Mr. Garnet. Life seemed very gray to him. He was a conscientious young man, and he knew that he ought to sit down and do some work. On the other hand, his brain felt like a cauliflower, and he could not think what to write about. This is one of the things which sour the young

author even more than do those long envelopes which so tastefully decorate his table of a morning.

He felt particularly unfitted for writing at that moment. The morning is not the time for inventive work. An article may be polished then, or a half-finished story completed, but 11 A.M. is not the hour at which to invent.

Jerry Garnet wandered restlessly about his sitting room. Rarely had it seemed so dull and depressing to him as it did then. The photographs on the mantelpiece irritated him. There was no change in them. They struck him as the concrete expression of monotony. His eye was caught by a picture hanging out of the straight. He jerked it to one side, and the effect became worse. He jerked it back again, and the thing looked as if it had been hung in a dim light by an astigmatic drunkard. Five minutes' pulling and hauling brought it back to a position only a shade less crooked than that in which he had found it, and by that time his restlessness had grown like a mushroom.

He looked out of the window. The sunlight was playing on the house opposite. He looked at his boots. At this point conscience prodded him sharply.

"I won't," he muttered fiercely, "I will work. I'll turn out something, even if it's the worst rot ever written."

With which admirable sentiment he tracked his blotting pad to its hiding place (Mrs. Medley found a fresh one every day), collected ink and pens, and sat down.

There was a distant thud from above, and shortly afterwards a thin tenor voice made itself heard above a vigorous splashing. The young gentleman on the top floor was starting another day.

"Oi'll—er—sing thee saw-ongs"—brief pause, then in a triumphant burst, as if the singer had just remembered the name—"ovarraby."

Mr. Garnet breathed a prayer and glared at the ceiling.

The voice continued:

"Ahnd—er—ta-ales of fa-arr Cahsh-meerer."

Sudden and grewsome pause. The splashing ceased. The singer could hardly have been drowned in a hip bath, but Mr. Garnet hoped for the best.

His hopes were shattered.

"Come," resumed the young gentleman persuasively, "into the garden, Maud, for ther black batter nah-eet hath—er—florn."

Jerry Garnet sprang from his seat and paced the room.

"This is getting perfectly impossible," he said to himself. "I must get out of this. A fellow can't work in London. I'll go down to some farmhouse in the country. I can't think here. You might just as well try to work at a musical 'At Home.'"

Here followed certain remarks about the young man upstairs, who was now, in lighter vein, putting in a spell at a popular melody from the Gaiety Theater.

He resumed his seat and set himself resolutely to hammer out something which, though it might not be literature, would at least be capable of being printed. A search through his commonplace book brought no balm. A commonplace book is the author's rag bag. In it he places all the insane ideas that come to him, in the groundless hope that some day he will be able to convert them with magic touch into marketable plots.

This was the luminous item which first met Mr. Garnet's eye:

Mem. Dead body found in railway carriage under seat. Only one living occupant of carriage. He is suspected of being the murderer, but proves that he only entered carriage at twelve o'clock in the morning, while the body has been dead since the previous night.

To this bright scheme were appended the words:

This will want some working up.

J. G.

"It will," thought Jerry Garnet grimly, "but it will have to go on wanting as far as I'm concerned."

The next entry he found was a perfectly inscrutable lyric outburst.

There are moments of annoyance, Void of every kind of joyance, In the complicated course of Man's affairs; But the very worst of any He experiences when he Meets a young, but active, lion on the stairs.

Sentiment unexceptionable. But as to the reason for the existence of the fragment, his mind was a blank. He shut the book impatiently. It was plain that no assistance was to be derived from it.

His thoughts wandered back to the idea of leaving London. London might have suited Dr. Johnson, but he had come to the conclusion that what he wanted to enable him to give the public of his best (as the reviewer of the Academy, dealing with his last work, had expressed a polite hope that he would continue to do) was country air. A farmhouse by the sea somewhere ... cows ... spreading boughs ... rooks ... brooks ... cream. In London the day stretches before a man, if he has no regular and appointed work to do, like a long, white, dusty road. It seems impossible to get to the end of it without vast effort. But in the country every hour has its amusements. Up with the lark. Morning dip. Cheery greetings. Local color. Huge breakfast. Long walks. Flannels. The ungirt loin. Good, steady spell of work from dinner till bedtime. The prospect fascinated him. His third novel was already in a nebulous state in his brain. A quiet week or two in the country would enable him to get it into shape.

He took from the pocket of his blazer a letter which had arrived some days before from an artist friend of his who was on a sketching tour in Devonshire and Somerset. There was a penciled memorandum on the envelope in his own handwriting:

Mem. Might work K. L.'s story about M. and the W—s's into comic yarn for one of

the weeklies.

He gazed at this for a while, with a last hope that in it might be contained the germ of something which would enable him to turn out a morning's work; but having completely forgotten who K. L. was, and especially what was his (or her) story about M., whoever he (or she) might be, he abandoned this hope and turned to the letter in the envelope.

The earlier portions of the letter dealt tantalizingly with the scenery. "Bits," come upon by accident at the end of disused lanes and transferred with speed to canvas, were described concisely but with sufficient breadth to make Garnet long to see them for himself. There were brief résumés of dialogues between Lickford (the writer) and weird rustics. The whole letter breathed of the country and the open air. The atmosphere of Garnet's sitting room seemed to him to become stuffier with every sentence he read.

The postscript interested him.

"... By the way, at Yeovil I came across an old friend of yours. Stanley Featherstonhaugh Ukridge, of all people. As large as life—quite six foot two, and tremendously filled out. I thought he was abroad. The last I heard of him was that he had started for Buenos Ayres in a cattle-ship. It seems he has been in England sometime. I met him in the refreshment room at Yeovil station. I was waiting for a down train; he had changed on his way to town. As I opened the door I heard a huge voice in a more or less violent altercation, and there was S. F. U., in a villainous old suit of gray flannels (I'll swear it was the same one that he had on last time I saw him), and a mackintosh, though it was a blazing hot day. His pince-nez were tacked onto his ears with wire as usual. He greeted me with effusive shouts, and drew me aside. Then after a few commonplaces of greeting, he fumbled in his pockets, looked pained and surprised.

"'Look here, Licky,' he said. 'You know I never borrow. It's against my principles.

But I must have a shilling, or I'm a ruined man. I seem to have had my pocket picked by some scoundrelly blackguard. Can you, my dear fellow, oblige me with a shilling until next Tuesday afternoon at three-thirty? I never borrow, so I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you have this (producing a beastly little three-penny-bit with a hole in it) until I can pay you back. This is of more value to me than I can well express, Licky, my boy. A very, very dear friend gave it to me when we parted, years ago. It's a wrench to part with it. But grim necessity ... I can hardly do it.... Still, no, no, ... you must take it, you must take it. Licky, old man, shake hands! Shake hands, my boy!'

"He then asked after you, and said you were the noblest man—except me—on earth. I gave him your address, not being able to get out of it, but if I were you I should fly while there is yet time."

"That," said Jerry Garnet, "is the soundest bit of advice I've heard. I will."

"Mrs. Medley," he said, when that lady made her appearance.

"Sir?"

"I'm going away for a few weeks. You can let the rooms if you like. I'll drop you a line when I think of coming back."

"Yes, sir. And your letters. Where shall I send them, sir?"

"Till further notice," said Jerry Garnet, pulling out a giant portmanteau from a corner of the room and flinging it open, "care of the Dalai Lama, No. 3 Younghusband Terrace, Tibet."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Medley placidly.

"I'll write you my address to-night. I don't know where I'm going yet. Is that an A. B. C. over there? Good. Give my love to that bright young spirit on the top floor, and tell him that I hope my not being here to listen won't interfere in any way with his morning popular concerts."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Mrs. Medley, if a man named ——"

Mrs. Medley had drifted silently away. During his last speech a thunderous knocking had begun on the front door.

Jerry Garnet stood and listened, transfixed. Something seemed to tell him who was at the business end of that knocker.

He heard Mrs. Medley's footsteps pass along the hall and pause at the door. Then there was the click of the latch. Then a volume of sound rushed up to him where he stood over his empty portmanteau.

"Is Mr. Garnet in?"

Mrs. Medley's reply was inaudible, but apparently in the affirmative.

"Where is he?" boomed the voice. "Show me the old horse. First floor. Thank you. Where is the man of wrath?"

There followed a crashing on the stairs such as even the young gentleman of the top floor had been unable to produce in his nocturnal rovings. The house shook.

And with the tramping came the thunderous voice, as the visitor once more gave tongue.

"Garnet! Garnet!! GARNET!!!"

UKRIDGE'S SCHEME

Chap_2

M

r. Stanley Featherstonhaugh Ukridge dashed into the room, uttering a roar of welcome as he caught sight of Garnet, still standing petrified athwart his portmanteau.

"My dear old man," he shouted, springing at him and seizing his hand in a clutch

that effectually woke Garnet from his stupor. "How are you, old chap? This is good. By Jove, this is good! This is fine, what?"

He dashed back to the door and looked out.

"Come on, Millie," he shouted.

Garnet was wondering who in the name of fortune Millie could possibly be, when there appeared on the further side of Mr. Ukridge the figure of a young woman. She paused in the doorway, and smiled pleasantly.

"Garnet, old horse," said Ukridge with some pride, "let me introduce you to my wife. Millie, this is old Garnet. You've heard me talk about him."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Ukridge.

Garnet bowed awkwardly. The idea of Ukridge married was something too overpowering to be assimilated on the instant. If ever there was a man designed by nature to be a bachelor, Stanley Ukridge was that man. Garnet could feel that he himself was not looking his best. He knew in a vague, impersonal way that his eyebrows were still somewhere in the middle of his forehead, whither they had sprung in the first moment of surprise, and that his jaw, which had dropped, had not yet resumed its normal posture. Before committing himself to speech he made a determined effort to revise his facial expression.

"Buck up, old horse," said Ukridge. He had a painful habit of addressing all and sundry by that title. In his school-master days he had made use of it while interviewing the parents of new pupils, and the latter had gone away, as a rule, with a feeling that this must be either the easy manner of genius or spirits, and hoping for the best. Later, he had used it to perfect strangers in the streets. On one occasion he had been heard to address a bishop by that title.

"Surprised to find me married, what? Garny, old boy"—sinking his voice to what was intended to be a whisper—"take my tip. You go and do the same. You feel another man. Give up this bachelor business. It's a mug's game. Go and get married,

my boy, go and get married. By gad, I've forgotten to pay the cabby. Half a moment."

He was out of the door and on his way downstairs before the echoes of his last remark had ceased to shake the window of the sitting room. Garnet was left to entertain Mrs. Ukridge.

So far her share in the conversation had been small. Nobody talked very much when Ukridge was on the scene. She sat on the edge of Garnet's big basket chair, looking very small and quiet. She smiled pleasantly, as she had done during the whole of the preceding dialogue. It was apparently her chief form of expression.

Jerry Garnet felt very friendly toward her. He could not help pitying her. Ukridge, he thought, was a very good person to know casually, but a little of him, as his former headmaster had once said in a moody, reflective voice, went a very long way. To be bound to him for life was not the ideal state for a girl. If he had been a girl, he felt, he would as soon have married a volcano.

"And she's so young," he thought, as he looked across at the basket chair. "Quite a kid."

"You and Stanley have known each other a long time, haven't you?" said the object of his pity, breaking the silence.

"Yes. Oh, yes," said Garnet. "Several years. We were masters at the same school together."

Mrs. Ukridge leaned forward with round, shining eyes.

"Isn't he a wonderful man, Mr. Garnet!" she said ecstatically.

Not yet, to judge from her expression and the tone of her voice, had she had experience of the disadvantages attached to the position of Mrs. Stanley Ukridge.

Garnet could agree with her there.

"Yes, he is certainly wonderful," he said.

"I believe he could do anything."

"Yes," said Garnet. He believed that Ukridge was at least capable of anything.

"He has done so many things. Have you ever kept fowls?" she broke off with apparent irrelevance.

"No," said Garnet. "You see, I spend so much of my time in town. I should find it difficult."

Mrs. Ukridge looked disappointed.

"I was hoping you might have had some experience. Stanley, of course, can turn his hand to anything, but I think experience is such a good thing, don't you?"

"It is," said Garnet, mystified. "But—"

"I have bought a shilling book called 'Fowls and All About Them,' but it is very hard to understand. You see, we—but here is Stanley. He will explain it all."

"Well, Garnet, old horse," said Ukridge, reëntering the room after another energetic passage of the stairs, "settle down and let's talk business. Found cabby gibbering on doorstep. Wouldn't believe I didn't want to bilk him. Had to give him an extra shilling. But now, about business. Lucky to find you in, because I've got a scheme for you, Garny, old boy. Yes, sir, the idea of a thousand years. Now listen to me for a moment."

He sat down on the table and dragged a chair up as a leg rest. Then he took off his pince-nez, wiped them, readjusted the wire behind his ears, and, having hit a brown patch on the knee of his gray flannel trousers several times in the apparent hope of removing it, began to speak.

"About fowls," he said.

"What about them?" asked Garnet. The subject was beginning to interest him. It showed a curious tendency to creep into the conversation.

"I want you to give me your undivided attention for a moment," said Ukridge. "I was

saying to my wife only the other day: 'Garnet's the man. Clever man, Garnet. Full of ideas.' Didn't I, Millie?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Ukridge, smiling.

"Well?" said Garnet.

"The fact is," said Ukridge, with a Micawber-like burst of candor, "we are going to keep fowls."

He stopped and looked at Garnet in order to see the effect of the information. Garnet bore it with fortitude.

"Yes?" he said.

Ukridge shifted himself farther on to the table and upset the inkpot.

"Never mind," he said, "it'll soak in. Don't you worry about that, you keep listening to me. When I said we meant to keep fowls, I didn't mean in a small sort of way—two cocks and a couple of hens and a ping-pong ball for a nest egg. We are going to do it on a large scale. We are going to keep," he concluded impressively, "a chicken farm!"

"A chicken farm," echoed Mrs. Ukridge with an affectionate and admiring glance at her husband.

"Ah," said Garnet, who felt his responsibilities as chorus.

"I've thought it all out," continued Ukridge, "and it's as clear as mud. No expenses, large profits, quick returns. Chickens, eggs, and no work. By Jove, old man, it's the idea of a lifetime. Just listen to me for a moment. You buy your hen—"

"One hen?" inquired Garnet.

"Call it one for the sake of argument. It makes my calculations clearer. Very well, then. You buy your hen. It lays an egg every day of the week. You sell the eggs—say—six for fivepence. Keep of hen costs nothing. Profit at least fourpence, three farthings on every half-dozen eggs. What do you think of that, Bartholomew?"

Garnet admitted that it sounded like an attractive scheme, but expressed a wish to overhaul the figures in case of error.

"Error!" shouted Ukridge, pounding the table with such energy that it groaned beneath him. "Error? Not a bit of it. Can't you follow a simple calculation like that? The thing is, you see, you get your original hen for next to nothing. That's to say, on tick. Anybody will let you have a hen on tick. Now listen to me for a moment. You let your hen set, and hatch chickens. Suppose you have a dozen hens. Very well, then. When each of the dozen has a dozen chickens, you send the old hens back with thanks for the kind loan, and there you are, starting business with a hundred and forty-four free chickens to your name. And after a bit, when the chickens grow up and begin to lay, all you have to do is to sit back in your chair and gather in the big checks. Isn't that so, Millie?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Ukridge with shining eyes.

"We've fixed it all up. Do you know Lyme Regis, in Dorsetshire? On the borders of Devon. Quiet little fishing village. Bathing. Sea air. Splendid scenery. Just the place for a chicken farm. I've been looking after that. A friend of my wife's has lent us a jolly old house with large grounds. All we've got to do is to get in the fowls. That's all right. I've ordered the first lot. We shall find them waiting for us when we arrive."

"Well," said Garnet, "I'm sure I wish you luck. Mind you let me know how you get on."

"Let you know!" roared Ukridge. "Why, old horse, you've got to come, too. We shall take no refusal. Shall we, Millie?"

"No, dear," murmured Mrs. Ukridge.

"Of course not," said Ukridge. "No refusal of any sort. Pack up to-night, and meet us at Waterloo to-morrow."

"It's awfully good of you—" began Garnet a little blankly.

"Not a bit of it, not a bit of it. This is pure business. I was saying to my wife when we came in that you were the very man for us. 'If old Garnet's in town,' I said, 'we'll have him. A man with his flow of ideas will be invaluable on a chicken farm.' Didn't I, Millie?"

Mrs. Ukridge murmured the response.

"You see, I'm one of these practical men. I go straight ahead, following my nose. What you want in a business of this sort is a touch of the dreamer to help out the practical mind. We look to you for suggestions, Montmorency. Timely suggestions with respect to the comfort and upbringing of the fowls. And you can work. I've seen you. Of course you take your share of the profits. That's understood. Yes, yes, I must insist. Strict business between friends. We must arrange it all when we get down there. My wife is the secretary of the firm. She has been writing letters to people, asking for fowls. So you see it's a thoroughly organized concern. There's money in it, old horse. Don't you forget that."

"We should be so disappointed if you did not come," said Mrs. Ukridge, lifting her childlike eyes to Garnet's face.

Garnet stood against the mantelpiece and pondered. In after years he recognized that that moment marked an epoch in his life. If he had refused the invitation, he would not have—but, to quote the old novelists, we anticipate. At any rate, he would have missed a remarkable experience. It is not given to everyone to see Mr. Stanley Ukridge manage a chicken farm.

"The fact is," he said at last, "I was thinking of going somewhere where I could get some golf."

Ukridge leaped on the table triumphantly.

"Lyme Regis is just the place for you, then. Perfect hotbed of golf. Fine links at the top of the hill, not half a mile from the farm. Bring your clubs. You'll be able to have a round or two in the afternoons. Get through serious work by lunch time."

"You know," said Garnet, "I am absolutely inexperienced as regards fowls."

"Excellent!" said Ukridge. "Then you're just the man. You will bring to the work a mind entirely unclouded by theories. You will act solely by the light of your intelligence."

"Er—yes," said Garnet.

"I wouldn't have a professional chicken farmer about the place if he paid to come. Natural intelligence is what we want. Then we can rely on you?"

"Very well," said Garnet slowly. "It's very kind of you to ask me."

"It's business, Cuthbert, business. Very well, then. We shall catch the eleven-twenty at Waterloo. Don't miss it. You book to Axminster. Look out for me on the platform. If I see you first, I'll shout."

Garnet felt that that promise rang true.

"Then good-by for the present. Millie, we must be off. Till to-morrow, Garnet."

"Good-by, Mr. Garnet," said Mrs. Ukridge.

Looking back at the affair after the lapse of years, Garnet was accustomed to come to the conclusion that she was the one pathetic figure in the farce. Under what circumstances she had married Ukridge he did not learn till later. He was also uncertain whether at any moment in her career she regretted it. But it was certainly pathetic to witness her growing bewilderment during the weeks that followed, as the working of Ukridge's giant mind was unfolded to her little by little. Life, as Ukridge understood the word, must have struck her as a shade too full of incident to be really comfortable. Garnet was wont to console himself by the hope that her very genuine love for her husband, and his equally genuine love for her, was sufficient to smooth out the rough places of life.

As he returned to his room, after showing his visitors to the door, the young man upstairs, who had apparently just finished breakfast, burst once more into song:

"We'll never come back no more, boys, We'll never come back no more."

Garnet could hear him wedding appropriate dance to the music.

"Not for a few weeks, at any rate," he said to himself, as he started his packing at the point where he had left off.

A GIRL WITH BROWN HAIR

Chap_3

W

aterloo station is one of the things which no fellow can understand. Thousands come to it, thousands go from it. Porters grow gray-headed beneath its roof. Buns, once fresh and tender, become hard and misanthropic in its refreshment rooms, and look as if they had seen the littleness of existence and were disillusioned. But there the station stands, year after year, wrapped in a discreet gloom, always the same, always baffling and inscrutable. Not even the porters understand it. "I couldn't say, sir," is the civil but unsatisfying reply with which research is met. Now and then one, more gifted than his colleagues, will inform the traveler that his train starts from "No. 3 or No. 7," but a moment's reflection and he hedges with No. 12.

Waterloo is the home of imperfect knowledge. The booking clerks cannot state in a few words where tickets may be bought for any station. They are only certain that they themselves cannot sell them.

The gloom of the station was lightened on the following morning at ten minutes to eleven when Mr. Garnet arrived to catch the train to Axminster, by several gleams of sunshine and a great deal of bustle and movement on the various platforms. A cheery activity pervaded the place. Porters on every hand were giving their celebrated imitations of the car of Juggernaut, throwing as a sop to the wounded a crisp "by your leave." Agitated ladies were pouring forth questions with the rapidity

of machine guns. Long queues surged at the mouths of the booking offices, inside which soured clerks, sending lost sheep empty away, were learning once more their lesson of the innate folly of mankind. Other crowds collected at the bookstalls, and the bookstall keeper was eying with dislike men who were under the impression that they were in a free library.

An optimistic porter had relieved Garnet of his portmanteau and golf clubs as he stepped out of his cab, and had arranged to meet him on No. 6 platform, from which, he asserted, with the quiet confidence which has made Englishmen what they are, the eleven-twenty would start on its journey to Axminster. Unless, he added, it went from No. 4.

Garnet, having bought a ticket, after drawing blank at two booking offices, made his way to the bookstall. Here he inquired, in a loud, penetrating voice, if they had got "Mr. Jeremy Garnet's last novel, 'The Maneuvers of Arthur.'" Being informed that they had not, he clicked his tongue cynically, advised the man in charge to order that work, as the demand for it might be expected shortly to be large, and spent a shilling on a magazine and some weekly papers. Then, with ten minutes to spare, he went off in search of Ukridge.

He found him on platform No. 6. The porter's first choice was, it seemed, correct. The eleven-twenty was already alongside the platform, and presently Garnet observed his porter cleaving a path toward him with the portmanteau and golf clubs.

"Here you are!" shouted Ukridge. "Good for you. Thought you were going to miss it."

Garnet shook hands with the smiling Mrs. Ukridge.

"I've got a carriage," said Ukridge, "and collared two corner seats. My wife goes down in another. She dislikes the smell of smoke when she's traveling. Let's pray that we get the carriage to ourselves. But all London seems to be here this morning. Get in, old horse. I'll just see her ladyship into her carriage and come back to you."

Garnet entered the compartment, and stood at the door, looking out in order, after the friendly manner of the traveling Briton, to thwart an invasion of fellow-travelers. Then he withdrew his head suddenly and sat down. An elderly gentleman, accompanied by a girl, was coming toward him. It was not this type of fellow-traveler whom he hoped to keep out. He had noticed the girl at the booking office. She had waited by the side of the line, while the elderly gentleman struggled gamely for the tickets, and he had plenty of opportunity of observing her appearance. For five minutes he had debated with himself as to whether her hair should rightly be described as brown or golden. He had decided finally on brown. It then became imperative that he should ascertain the color of her eyes. Once only had he met them, and then only for a second. They might be blue. They might be gray. He could not be certain. The elderly gentleman came to the door of the compartment and looked in.

"This seems tolerably empty, my dear Phyllis," he said.

Garnet, his glance fixed on his magazine, made a note of the name. It harmonized admirably with the hair and the eyes of elusive color.

"You are sure you do not object to a smoking carriage, my dear?"

"Oh, no, father. Not at all."

Garnet told himself that the voice was just the right sort of voice to go with the hair, the eyes, and the name.

"Then I think—" said the elderly gentleman, getting in. The inflection of his voice suggested the Irishman. It was not a brogue. There were no strange words. But the general effect was Irish. Garnet congratulated himself. Irishmen are generally good company. An Irishman with a pretty daughter should be unusually good company.

The bustle on the platform had increased momently, until now, when, from the snorting of the engine, it seemed likely that the train might start at any minute, the crowd's excitement was extreme. Shrill cries echoed down the platform. Lost sheep,

singly and in companies, rushed to and fro, peering eagerly into carriages in the search for seats. Piercing cries ordered unknown "Tommies" and "Ernies" to "keep by aunty, now." Just as Ukridge returned, the dreaded "Get in anywhere" began to be heard, and the next moment an avalanche of warm humanity poured into the carriage. A silent but bitter curse framed itself on Garnet's lips. His chance of pleasant conversation with the lady of the brown hair and the eyes that were either gray or blue was at an end.

The newcomers consisted of a middle-aged lady, addressed as aunty; a youth called Albert, subsequently described by Garnet as the rudest boy on earth—a proud title, honestly won; lastly, a niece of some twenty years, stolid and seemingly without interest in life.

Ukridge slipped into his corner, adroitly foiling Albert, who had made a dive in that direction. Albert regarded him fixedly for a space, then sank into the seat beside Garnet and began to chew something grewsome that smelled of aniseed.

Aunty, meanwhile, was distributing her weight evenly between the toes of the Irish gentleman and those of his daughter, as she leaned out of the window to converse with a lady friend in a straw hat and hair curlers. Phyllis, he noticed, was bearing it with angelic calm. Her profile, when he caught sight of it round aunty, struck him as a little cold, even haughty. That, however, might be due to what she was suffering. It is unfair to judge a lady's character from her face, at a moment when she is in a position of physical discomfort. The train moved off with a jerk in the middle of a request on the part of the straw-hatted lady that her friend would "remember that, you know, about him," and aunty, staggering back, sat down on a bag of food which Albert had placed on the seat beside him.

"Clumsy!" observed Albert tersely.

"Albert, you mustn't speak to aunty so."

"Wodyer want sit on my bag for, then?" inquired Albert.

They argued the point.

Garnet, who should have been busy studying character for a novel of the lower classes, took up his magazine and began to read. The odor of aniseed became more and more painful. Ukridge had lighted a cigar, and Garnet understood why Mrs. Ukridge preferred to travel in another compartment. For "in his hand he bore the brand which none but he might smoke."

Garnet looked stealthily across the carriage to see how his lady of the hair and eyes was enduring this combination of evils, and noticed that she, too, had begun to read. And as she put down the book to look out of the window at the last view of London, he saw with a thrill that it was "The Maneuvers of Arthur." Never before had he come upon a stranger reading his work. And if "The Maneuvers of Arthur" could make the reader oblivious to surroundings such as these, then, felt Garnet, it was no common book—a fact which he had long since suspected.

The train raced on toward the sea. It was a warm day, and a torpid peace began to settle down on the carriage.

Soon only Garnet, the Irishman, and the lady were awake.

"What's your book, me dear?" asked the Irishman.

"'The Maneuvers of Arthur,' father," said Phyllis. "By Jeremy Garnet."

Garnet would not have believed without the evidence of his ears that his name could possibly have sounded so well.

"Dolly Strange gave it to me when I left the abbey," continued Phyllis. "She keeps a shelf of books for her guests when they are going away. Books that she considers rubbish and doesn't want, you know."

Garnet hated Dolly Strange without further evidence.

"And what do you think of it, me dear?"

"I like it," said Phyllis decidedly. The carriage swam before Garnet's eyes. "I think it

is very clever. I shall keep it."

"Bless you," thought Garnet, "and I will write my precious autograph on every page, if you want it."

"I wonder who Jeremy Garnet is?" said Phyllis. "I imagine him rather an old young man, probably with an eyeglass and conceited. He must be conceited. I can tell that from the style. And I should think he didn't know many girls. At least, if he thinks Pamela Grant an ordinary sort of girl."

"Is she not?" asked her father.

"She's a cr-r-reature," said Phyllis emphatically.

This was a blow to Garnet, and demolished the self-satisfaction which her earlier criticisms had caused to grow within him. He had always looked on Pamela as something very much out of the ordinary run of feminine character studies. That scene between her and the curate in the conservatory.... And when she finds Arthur at the meet of the Blankshire.... He was sorry she did not like Pamela. Somehow it lowered Pamela in his estimation.

"But I like Arthur," said Phyllis, and she smiled—the first time Garnet had seen her do so.

Garnet also smiled to himself. Arthur was the hero. He was a young writer. Ergo, Arthur was himself.

The train was beginning to slow down. Signs of returning animation began to be noticeable among the sleepers. A whistle from the engine, and the train drew up in a station. Looking out of the window, Garnet saw that it was Yeovil. There was a general exodus. Aunty became instantly a thing of dash and electricity, collected parcels, shook Albert, replied to his thrusts with repartee, and finally headed a stampede out of the door.

To Garnet's chagrin the Irish gentleman and his daughter also rose. Apparently this

was to be the end of their brief acquaintanceship. They alighted and walked down the platform.

"Where are we?" said Ukridge sleepily, opening his eyes. "Yeovil? Not far now, old horse."

With which remark he closed his eyes again and returned to his slumbers.

Garnet's eye, roving disconsolately over the carriage, was caught by something lying in the far corner. It was the criticized "Maneuvers of Arthur." The girl had left it behind.

What follows shows the vanity that obsesses our young and rising authors. It did not enter into his mind that the book might have been left behind of set purpose, as being of no further use to the owner. It only occurred to him that if he did not act swiftly the lady of the hair and eyes would suffer a loss beside which the loss of a purse or a hand bag were trivial.

He acted swiftly.

Five seconds later he was at the end of the platform, flushed but courteous.

"Excuse me," he said, "I think—"

"Thank you," said the girl.

Garnet made his way back to his carriage.

"They are blue," he said.

THE ARRIVAL

Chap_4

F

rom Axminster to Lyme Regis the line runs through country as pretty as any that can be found in the island, and the train, as if in appreciation of this fact, does not hurry

over the journey. It was late afternoon by the time the chicken farmers reached their destination.

The arrangements for the carrying of luggage at Lyme Regis border on the primitive. Boxes are left on the platform, and later, when he thinks of it, a carrier looks in and conveys them down into the valley and up the hill on the opposite side to the address written on the labels. The owner walks. Lyme Regis is not a place for the halt and maimed.

Ukridge led his band in the direction of the farm, which lay across the valley, looking through woods to the sea. The place was visible from the station, from which, indeed, standing as it did on the top of a hill, the view was extensive.

Halfway up the slope on the other side of the valley the party left the road and made their way across a spongy field, Ukridge explaining that this was a short cut. They climbed through a hedge, crossed a stream and another field, and after negotiating a difficult bank topped with barbed wire, found themselves in a kitchen garden.

Ukridge mopped his forehead and restored his pince-nez to their original position, from which the passage of the barbed wire had dislodged them.

"This is the place," he said. "We have come in by the back way. It saves time. Tired, Millie?"

"No, dear, thank you."

"Without being tired," said Garnet, "I am distinctly ready for tea. What are the prospects?"

"That'll be all right," said Ukridge, "don't you worry. A most competent man, of the name of Beale, and his wife are in charge at present. I wrote to them telling them that we were coming to-day. They will be ready for us."

They were at the front door by this time. Ukridge rang the bell. The noise reëchoed through the house, but there were no answering footsteps. He rang again. There is no

mistaking the note of a bell in an empty house. It was plain that the most competent man and his wife were out.

"Now what are you going to do?" said Garnet.

Mrs. Ukridge looked at her husband with quiet confidence.

Ukridge fell back on reminiscence.

"This," he said, leaning against the door and endeavoring to button his collar at the back, "reminds me of an afternoon in the Argentine. Two other men and myself tried for three quarters of an hour to get into an empty house, where there looked as if there might be something to eat, and we'd just got the door open when the owner turned up from behind a tree with a shotgun. It was a little difficult to explain. There was a dog, too. We were glad to say good-by."

At this moment history partially repeated itself. From the other side of the door came a dissatisfied whine, followed by a short bark.

"Halloo," said Ukridge, "Beale has a dog."

"And the dog," said Garnet, "will have us if we're not careful. What are you going to do?"

"Let's try the back," said Ukridge. "We must get in. What right," he added with pathos, "has a beastly mongrel belonging to a man I employ to keep me out of my own house? It's a little hard. Here am I, slaving to support Beale, and when I try to get into my house, his infernal dog barks at me. But we will try kindness first. Let me get to the keyhole. I will parley with the animal."

He put his mouth to the keyhole and roared the soothing words "Goo' dog!" through it. Instantly the door shook as some heavy object hurled itself against it. The barking rang through the house.

"Kindness seems to be a drug in the market," said Garnet. "Do you see your way to trying a little force?"

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Ukridge, rising. "We'll go round and get in at the kitchen window."

"And how long are we to stay there? Till the dog dies?"

"I never saw such a man as you," protested Ukridge. "You have a perfect mania for looking on the dark side. The dog won't guard the kitchen door. We shall manage to shut him up somewhere."

"Oh," said Garnet.

"And now let's get in and have something to eat, for goodness' sake."

The kitchen window proved to be insecurely latched. Ukridge flung it open and they climbed in.

The dog, hearing the sound of voices, raced back along the passage and flung himself at the door. He then proceeded to scratch at the panels in the persevering way of one who feels that he is engaged upon a business at which he is a specialist.

Inside the kitchen, Ukridge took command.

"Never mind the dog," he said, "let it scratch."

"I thought," said Garnet, "we were going to shut it up somewhere?"

"Go out and shut it into the dining room, then. Personally, I mean to have some tea. Millie, you know how to light a fire. Garnet and I will be collecting cups and things. When that scoundrel Beale arrives, I shall tear him limb from limb. Deserting us like this! The man must be a thorough fraud. He told me he was an old soldier. If this was the sort of discipline they used to keep in his regiment, I don't wonder that the service is going to the dogs. There goes a plate! How is the fire getting on, Millie? I'll chop Beale into little bits. What's that you've got there, Garny, old horse? Tea? Good! Where's the bread? There! Another plate. Look here, I'll give that dog three minutes, and if it doesn't stop scratching that door by then, I'll take the bread knife and go out and have a soul-to-soul talk with it. It's a little hard. My own house, and

the first thing I find in it when I arrive is somebody else's beastly dog scratching holes in the doors. Stop it, you beast!"

The dog's reply was to continue his operations piu mosso.

Ukridge's eyes gleamed behind their glasses.

"Give me a good large jug," he said with ominous calm.

He took the largest of the jugs from the dresser and strode with it into the scullery, whence came the sound of running water. He returned carrying the jug in both hands. His mien was that of a general who sees his way to a master stroke of strategy.

"Garny, old horse," he said, "tack on to the handle, and when I give the word fling wide the gates. Then watch that beast beyond the door get the surprise of its lifetime."

Garnet attached himself to the handle as directed. Ukridge gave the word. They had a momentary vision of an excited dog of the mongrel class framed in the open doorway, all eyes and teeth; then the passage was occupied by a spreading pool, and indignant barks from the distance told that the mongrel was thinking the thing over in some safe retreat.

They had a momentary vision of an excited dog, framed in the doorway. They had a momentary vision of an excited dog, framed in the doorway.

"Settled his hash," said Ukridge complacently. "Nothing like resource, Garnet, my boy. Some men would have gone on letting a good door be ruined."

"And spoiled the dog for a ha-porth of water," said Garnet. "I suppose we shall have to clean up that mess some time."

"There you go," said Ukridge, "looking on the dark side. Be an optimist, my boy, be an optimist. Beale and Mrs. Beale shall clean that passage as a penance. How is the fire, Millie?"

"The kettle is just boiling, dear."

Over a cup of tea Ukridge became the man of business.

"I wonder when those fowls are going to arrive. They should have been here to-day. If they don't come to-morrow, I shall lodge a complaint. There must be no slackness. They must bustle about. After tea I'll show you the garden, and we will choose a place for a fowl run. To-morrow we must buckle to. Serious work will begin immediately after breakfast."

"Suppose," said Garnet, "the fowls arrive before we are ready for them?"

"Why, then, they must wait."

"But you can't keep fowls cooped up indefinitely in a crate. I suppose they will come in a crate. I don't know much about these things."

"Oh, that'll be all right. There's a basement to this house. We'll let 'em run about there till we're ready for them. There's always a way of doing things if you look for it."

"I hope you are going to let the hens hatch some of the eggs, Stanley, dear," said Mrs. Ukridge. "I should so love to have some dear little chickens."

"Of course," said Ukridge. "My idea was this: These people will send us fifty fowls of sorts. That means—call it forty eggs a day. Let 'em hatch out thirty a day, and we will use the other ten for the table. We shall want at least ten. Well, I'm hanged, that dog again! Where's that jug?"

But this time an unforeseen interruption prevented the maneuver from being the success it had been before. Garnet had turned the handle, and was just about to pull the door open, while Ukridge, looking like some modern and dilapidated version of Discobolus, stood beside him with his jug poised, when a hoarse voice spoke from the window.

"Stand still!" said the voice, "or I'll corpse you."

Garnet dropped the handle, Ukridge dropped the jug, Mrs. Ukridge screamed.

At the window, with a double-barreled gun in his hands, stood a short, square, red-headed man. The muzzle of his gun, which rested on the sill, was pointing in a straight line at the third button of Garnet's waistcoat. With a distant recollection of the Deadwood Dick literature of his childhood, Garnet flung both hands above his head.

Ukridge emitted a roar like that of a hungry lion.

"Beale!" he shouted. "You scoundrelly, unprincipled blackguard! What are you doing with that gun? Why were you out? What have you been doing? Why did you shout like that? Look what you've made me do."

He pointed to the floor. Broken crockery, spreading water, his own shoes—exceedingly old tennis shoes—well soaked, attested the fact that damage had been done.

"Lor'! Mr. Ukridge, sir, is that you?" said the red-headed man calmly. "I thought you was burglars."

A sharp bark from the other side of the kitchen door, followed by a renewal of the scratching, drew Mr. Beale's attention to his faithful hound.

"That's Bob," he said.

"I don't know what you call the brute," said Ukridge. "Come in and tie him up."

"'Ow am I to get in, Mr. Ukridge, sir?"

"Come in through the window, and mind what you're doing with that gun. After you've finished with the dog, I should like a brief chat with you, if you can spare the time and have no other engagements."

Mr. Beale, having carefully deposited his gun against the wall of the kitchen, and dropped a pair of very limp rabbits with a thud to the floor, proceeded to climb through the window. This operation performed, he stood on one side while the

besieged garrison passed out by the same road.

"You will find me in the garden, Beale," said Ukridge. "I have one or two little things to say to you."

Mr. Beale grinned affably.

The cool air of the garden was grateful after the warmth of the kitchen. It was a pretty garden, or would have been, if it had not been so neglected. Garnet seemed to see himself sitting in a deck chair on the lawn, looking through the leaves of the trees at the harbor below. It was a spot, he felt, in which it would be an easy and pleasant task to shape the plot of his novel. He was glad he had come. About now, outside his lodgings in town, a particularly lethal barrel organ would be striking up the latest revolting air with which the halls had inflicted London.

"Here you are, Beale," said Ukridge, as the red-headed man approached. "Now, then, what have you to say?"

The hired man looked thoughtful for a while, then observed that it was a fine evening. Garnet felt that he was begging the question. He was a strong, healthy man, and should have scorned to beg.

"Fine evening?" shouted Ukridge. "What—on—earth has that got to do with it? I want to know why you and Mrs. Beale were both out when we arrived?"

"The missus went to Axminster, Mr. Ukridge, sir."

"She had no right to go to Axminster. I don't pay her large sums to go to Axminster. You knew I was coming this evening."

"No, Mr. Ukridge, sir."

"You didn't!"

"No, Mr. Ukridge, sir."

"Beale," said Ukridge with studied calm, "one of us two is a fool."

"I noticed that, sir."

"Let us sift this matter to the bottom. You got my letter?"

"No, Mr. Ukridge, sir."

"My letter saying that I should arrive to-night. You did not get it?"

"No, sir."

"Now look here, Beale," said Ukridge, "I am certain that that letter was posted. I remember placing it in my pocket for that purpose. It is not there now. See. These are all the contents of my—well, I'm hanged!"

He stood looking at the envelope he had produced from his breast pocket. Mr. Beale coughed.

"Beale," said Ukridge, "you—er—there seems to have been a mistake."

"Yes, sir."

"You are not so much to blame as I thought."

"No, sir."

"Anyhow," said Ukridge, in inspired tones, "I'll go and slay that infernal dog. Where's your gun, Beale?"

But better counsels prevailed, and the proceedings closed with a cold but pleasant little dinner, at which the spared mongrel came out unexpectedly strong with brainy and diverting tricks.

BUCKLING TO

Chap_5

S

unshine, streaming into his bedroom through the open window, woke Garnet next day as distant clocks were striking eight. It was a lovely morning, cool and fresh. The grass of the lawn, wet with dew, sparkled in the sun. A thrush, who knew all

about early birds and their perquisites, was filling in the time before the arrival of the worm with a song or two as he sat in the bushes. In the ivy a colony of sparrows were opening the day well with a little brisk fighting. On the gravel in front of the house lay the mongrel Bob, blinking lazily.

The gleam of the sea through the trees turned Garnet's thoughts to bathing. He dressed quickly and went out. Bob rose to meet him, waving an absurdly long tail. The hatchet was definitely buried now. That little matter of the jug of water was forgotten.

"Well, Bob," said Garnet, "coming down to watch me bathe?"

Bob uttered a bark of approval and ran before him to the gate.

A walk of five minutes brought Garnet to the sleepy little town. He passed through the narrow street, and turned on to the beach, walking in the direction of the cob, that combination of pier and breakwater which the misadventures of one of Jane Austen's young misses have made known to the outside public.

The tide was high, and Garnet, leaving his clothes to the care of Bob, dived into twelve feet of clear, cold water. As he swam he compared it with the morning tub of town, and felt that he had done well to come with Ukridge to this pleasant spot. But he could not rely on unbroken calm during the whole of his visit. He did not know a great deal about chicken farming, but he was certain that Ukridge knew less. There would be some strenuous moments before that farm became a profitable commercial speculation. At the thought of Ukridge toiling on a hot afternoon to manage an undisciplined mob of fowls, and becoming more and more heated and voluble in the struggle, he laughed and promptly swallowed a generous mouthful of salt water. There are few things which depress the swimmer more than an involuntary draught of water. Garnet turned and swam back to Bob and the clothes.

As he strolled back along the beach he came upon a small, elderly gentleman toweling his head in a vigorous manner. Hearing Garnet's footsteps, he suspended

this operation for a moment and peered out at him from beneath a turban of towel.

It was the elderly Irishman of the journey, the father of the blue-eyed Phyllis. Then they had come on to Lyme Regis after all. Garnet stopped, with some idea of going back and speaking to him; but realizing that they were perfect strangers, he postponed this action and followed Bob up the hill. In a small place like Lyme Regis it would surely not be difficult to find somebody who would introduce them. He cursed the custom which made such a thing necessary. In a properly constituted country everybody would know everybody else without fuss or trouble.

He found Ukridge, in his shirt sleeves and minus a collar, assailing a large ham. Mrs. Ukridge, looking younger and more childlike than ever in brown holland, smiled at him over the teapot.

"Here he is!" shouted Ukridge, catching sight of him. "Where have you been, old horse? I went to your room, but you weren't there. Bathing? Hope it's made you feel fit for work, because we've got to buckle to this morning."

"The fowls have arrived, Mr. Garnet," said Mrs. Ukridge, opening her eyes till she looked like an astonished kitten. "Such a lot of them! They're making such a noise!"

And to support her statement there floated through the window a cackling, which, for volume and variety of key, beat anything that Garnet had ever heard. Judging from the noise, it seemed as if England had been drained of fowls and the entire tribe of them dumped into the yard of the Ukridge's farm.

"There seems to have been no stint," he said, sitting down. "Did you order a million or only nine hundred thousand?"

"Good many, aren't there?" said Ukridge complacently. "But that's what we want. No good starting on a small scale. The more you have, the bigger the profits."

"What sort have you got mostly?"

"Oh, all sorts. Bless you, people don't mind what breed a fowl is, so long as it is a

fowl. These dealer chaps were so infernally particular. 'Any Dorkings?' they said. 'All right,' I said, 'bring on your Dorkings.' 'Or perhaps you want a few Minorcas?' 'Very well,' I said, 'show Minorcas.' They were going on—they'd have gone on for hours, but I stopped 'em. 'Look here, Maximilian,' I said to the manager Johnny—decent old chap, with the manners of a marquis—'look here,' I said, 'life is short, and we're neither of us as young as we used to be. Don't let us waste the golden hours playing guessing games. I want fowls. You sell fowls. So give me some of all sorts.' And he has, by Jove! There must be one of every breed ever invented."

"Where are you going to put them?"

"That spot we chose by the paddock. That's the place. Plenty of mud for them to scratch about in, and they can go into the field when they want to, and pick up worms, or whatever they feed on. We must rig them up some sort of a shanty, I suppose, this morning. We'll go and tell 'em to send up some wire netting and stuff from the town."

"Then we shall want hencoops. We shall have to make those."

"Of course. So we shall. Millie, didn't I tell you that old Garnet was the man to think of things! I forgot the coops. We can't buy some, I suppose? On tick?"

"Cheaper to make them. Suppose we get a lot of boxes. Soap boxes are as good as any. It won't take long to knock up a few coops."

Ukridge thumped the table with enthusiasm.

"Garny, old horse, you're a marvel. You think of everything. We'll buckle to right away. What a noise those fowls are making. I suppose they don't feel at home in the yard. Wait till they see the A1 residential mansions we're going to put up for them. Finished breakfast? Then let's go out. Come along, Millie."

The red-headed Beale, discovered leaning in an attitude of thought on the yard gate, and observing the feathered mob below, was roused from his reflections and

dispatched to the town for the wire and soap boxes. Ukridge, taking his place at the gate, gazed at the fowls with the affectionate eye of a proprietor.

"Well, they have certainly taken you at your word," said Garnet, "as far as variety is concerned."

The man with the manners of a marquis seemed to have been at great pains to send a really representative supply of fowls. There were blue ones, black ones, white, gray, yellow, brown, big, little, Dorkings, Minorcas, Cochin Chinas, Bantams, Orpingtons, Wyandottes, and a host more. It was an imposing spectacle.

The hired man returned toward the end of the morning, preceded by a cart containing the necessary wire and boxes, and Ukridge, whose enthusiasm brooked no delay, started immediately the task of fashioning the coops, while Garnet, assisted by Beale, draped the wire netting about the chosen spot next to the paddock. There were little unpleasantnesses—once a roar of anguish told that Ukridge's hammer had found the wrong billet, and on another occasion Garnet's flannel trousers suffered on the wire—but the work proceeded steadily. By the middle of the afternoon things were in a sufficiently advanced state to suggest to Ukridge the advisability of a halt for refreshments.

"That's the way to do it," said he. "At this rate we shall have the place in A1 condition before bedtime. What do you think of those for coops, Beale?"

The hired man examined them gravely.

"I've seen worse, sir."

He continued his examination.

"But not many," he added. Beale's passion for truth had made him unpopular in three regiments.

"They aren't so bad," said Garnet, "but I'm glad I'm not a fowl."

"So you ought to be," said Ukridge, "considering the way you've put up that wire.

You'll have them strangling themselves."

In spite of earnest labor, the housing arrangements of the fowls were still in an incomplete state at the end of the day. The details of the evening's work are preserved in a letter which Garnet wrote that night to his friend Lickford.

"... Have you ever played a game called 'Pigs in Clover'? We have just finished a bout of it (with hens instead of marbles) which has lasted for an hour and a half. We are all dead tired except the hired man, who seems to be made of India rubber. He has just gone for a stroll to the beach. Wants some exercise, I suppose. Personally, I feel as if I should never move again. I have run faster and farther than I have done since I was at school. You have no conception of the difficulty of rounding up fowls and getting them safely to bed. Having no proper place to put them, we were obliged to stow some of them inside soap boxes and the rest in the basement. It has only just occurred to me that they ought to have had perches to roost on. It didn't strike me before. I shall not mention it to Ukridge, or that indomitable man will start making some, and drag me into it, too. After all, a hen can rough it for one night, and if I did a stroke more work I should collapse. My idea was to do the thing on the slow but sure principle. That is to say, take each bird singly and carry it to bed. It would have taken some time, but there would have been no confusion. But you can imagine that that sort of thing would not appeal to Ukridge. There is a touch of the Napoleon about him. He likes his maneuvers to be daring and on a large scale. He said: 'Open the yard gate and let the fowls come out into the open, then sail in and drive them in a mass through the back door into the basement.' It was a great idea, but there was one fatal flaw in it. It didn't allow for the hens scattering. We opened the gate, and out they all came like an audience coming out of a theater. Then we closed in on them to bring off the big drive. For about three seconds it looked as if we might do it. Then Bob, the hired man's dog, an animal who likes to be in whatever's going on, rushed out of the house into the middle of them, barking. There was a perfect stampede, and Heaven only knows where some of those fowls are now. There was

one in particular, a large yellow bird, which, I should imagine, is nearing London by this time. The last I saw of it, it was navigating at the rate of knots, so to speak, in that direction, with Bob after it barking his hardest. Presently Bob came back, panting, having evidently given up the job. We, in the meantime, were chasing the rest of the birds all over the garden. The thing had now resolved itself into the course of action I had suggested originally, except that instead of collecting them quietly and at our leisure, we had to run miles for each one we captured. After a time we introduced some sort of system into it. Mrs. Ukridge (fancy him married; did you know?) stood at the door. We chased the hens and brought them in. Then as we put each through into the basement, she shut the door on it. We also arranged Ukridge's soap-box coops in a row, and when we caught a fowl we put it into the coop and stuck a board in front of it. By these strenuous means we gathered in about two thirds of the lot. The rest are all over England. A few may be in Dorsetshire, but I should not like to bet on it.

"So you see things are being managed on the up-to-date chicken farm on good, sound, Ukridge principles. This is only the beginning. I look with confidence for further exciting events. I believe, if Ukridge kept white mice, he would manage to knock some feverish excitement out of it. He is at present lying on the sofa, smoking one of his infernal brand of cigars. From the basement I can hear faintly the murmur of innumerable fowls. We are a happy family; we are, we are, we ARE!

"P. S. Have you ever caught a fowl and carried it to roost? You take it under the wings, and the feel of it sets one's teeth on edge. It is a grisly experience. All the time you are carrying it, it makes faint protesting noises and struggles feebly to escape.

"P. P. S. You know the opinion of Pythagoras respecting fowls. That 'the soul of our granddam might haply inhabit a bird.' I hope that yellow hen which Bob chased into the purple night is not the grandmamma of any friend of mine."

A REUNION

Chap_6

T

he day was Thursday, the date July the twenty-second. We had been chicken farmers for a whole week, and things were beginning to settle down to a certain extent. The coops were finished. They were not masterpieces, and I have seen chickens pause before them in deep thought, as who should say: "Now what in the world have we struck here?" But they were coops, within the meaning of the act, and we induced the hens to become tenants. The hardest work had been the fixing of the wire netting. This was the department of the hired man and myself. Beale and I worked ourselves into a fever in the sun, while the senior partner of the firm sat in the house, writing out plans and ideas and scribbling down his accounts (which must have been complicated) on gilt-edged correspondence cards. From time to time he abused his creditors, who were numerous.

Ukridge's financial methods were always puzzling to the ordinary mind. We had hardly been at the farm a day before he began to order in a vast supply of necessary and unnecessary articles—all on credit. Some he got from the village, others from neighboring towns. He has a way with him, like Father O'Flynn, and the tradesmen behaved beautifully. The things began to pour in from all sides—suits, groceries (of the very best), a piano, a gramophone, and pictures of all kinds. He was not one of those men who want but little here below. He wanted a great deal, and of a superior quality. If a tradesman suggested that a small check on account would not be taken amiss, as one or two sordid fellows of the village did, he became pathetic.

"Confound it, sir," he would say with tears in his voice, laying a hand on the man's shoulder in an elder brotherly way, "it's a trifle hard when a gentleman comes to settle here, that you should dun him for things before he has settled the preliminary expenses about his house."

This sounded well, and suggested the disbursement of huge sums for rent. The fact that the house had been lent him rent free was kept with some care in the background. Having weakened the man with pathos, he would strike a sterner note. "A little more of this," he would go on, "and I'll close my account. As it is, I think I will remove my patronage to a firm which will treat me civilly. Why, sir, I've never heard anything like it in all my experience." Upon which the man would knuckle under and go away forgiven, with a large order for more goods.

Once, when Ukridge and I were alone, I ventured to expostulate. High finance was always beyond my mental grasp. "Pay?" he exclaimed, "of course we shall pay. You don't seem to realize the possibilities of this business. Garny, my boy, we are on to a big thing. The money isn't coming in yet. We must give it time. But soon we shall be turning over hundreds every week. I am in touch with Whiteley's and Harrod's and all the big places. Perfectly simple business matter. Here I am, I said, with a large chicken farm with all the modern improvements. You want eggs, I said. I supply them. I will let you have so many hundred eggs a week, I said; what will you give for them? Well, their terms did not come up to my scheduled prices, I admit, but we mustn't sneer at small prices at first."

The upshot of it was that the firms mentioned supplied us with a quantity of goods, agreeing to receive phantom eggs in exchange. This satisfied Ukridge. He had a faith in the laying powers of his hens which would have flattered those birds if they could have known of it. It might also have stimulated their efforts in that direction, which up to date were feeble. This, however, I attributed to the fact that the majority of our fowls—perhaps through some sinister practical joke on the part of the manager who had the manners of a marquis—were cocks. It vexed Ukridge. "Here we are," he said complainingly, "living well and drinking well, in a newly furnished house, having to keep a servant and maintain our position in life, with expenses mounting and not a penny coming in. It's absurd. We've got hundreds of hens (most of them cocks, it's true, but I forgot they didn't lay), and getting not even enough

eggs for our own table. We must make some more arrangements. Come on in and let us think the thing out."

But this speech was the outcome of a rare moment of pessimism. In his brighter moods he continued to express unbounded faith in the hens, and was willing to leave the thing to time.

Meanwhile, we were creating quite a small sensation in the neighborhood. The interest of the natives was aroused at first by the fact that nearly all of them received informal visits from our fowls, which had strayed. Small boys would arrive in platoons, each bearing his quota of stragglers. "Be these your 'ens, zur?" was the formula. "If they be, we've got twenty-fower mower in our yard. Could 'ee coom over and fetch 'em?"

However, after the hired retainer and I had completed our work with the wire netting, desertions became less frequent. People poured in from villages for miles around to look at the up-to-date chicken farm. It was a pleasing and instructive spectacle to see Ukridge, in a pink shirt without a collar, and very dirty flannel trousers, lecturing to the intelligent natives on the breeding of fowls. They used to go away with the dazed air of men who have heard strange matters, and Ukridge, unexhausted, would turn to interview the next batch. I fancy we gave Lyme Regis something to think about. Ukridge must have been in the nature of a staggerer to the rustic mind.

It was now, as I have said, Thursday, the twenty-second of July, a memorable date to me. A glorious, sunny morning, of the kind which Nature provides occasionally, in an ebullition of benevolence. It is at times such as this that we dream our dreams and compose our masterpieces.

And a masterpiece I was, indeed, making. The new novel was growing nobly. Striking scenes and freshets of scintillating dialogue rushed through my mind. I had neglected my writing for the past week in favor of the tending of fowls, but I was

making up for lost time now. Another uninterrupted quarter of an hour, and I firmly believe I should have completed the framework of a novel that would have placed me with the great, in that select band whose members have no Christian names. Another quarter of an hour and posterity would have known me as "Garnet."

But it was not to be. I had just framed the most poignant, searching conversation between my heroine and my hero, and was about to proceed, flushed with great thoughts, to further triumphs, when a distant shout brought me to earth.

"Stop her! Catch her! Garnet!"

I was in the paddock at the time. Coming toward me at her best pace was a small hen. Behind the hen was Bob, doing, as usual, the thing that he ought not to have done. Behind Bob—some way behind—was Ukridge. It was his shout that I had heard.

"After her, Garny, old horse!" he repeated. "A valuable bird. Must not be lost."

When not in a catalepsy of literary composition, I am essentially the man of action. I laid aside my novel for future reference, and, after a fruitless lunge at the hen as it passed, joined Bob in the chase.

We passed out of the paddock in the following order: First, the hen, as fresh as paint, and good for a five-mile spin; next, Bob, panting but fit for anything; lastly, myself, determined, but mistrustful of my powers of pedestrianism. In the distance Ukridge gesticulated and shouted advice.

After the first field Bob gave up the chase, and sauntered off to scratch at a rabbit hole. He seemed to think that he had done all that could be expected of him in setting the thing going. His air suggested that he knew the affair was in competent hands, and relied on me to do the right thing.

The exertions of the past few days had left me in very fair condition, but I could not help feeling that in competition with the hen I was overmatched. Neither in speed nor in staying power was I its equal. But I pounded along doggedly. Whenever I find

myself fairly started on any business I am reluctant to give it up. I began to set an extravagant value on the capture of the small hen. All the abstract desire for fame which had filled my mind five minutes before was concentrated now on that one feat. In a calmer moment I might have realized that one bird more or less would not make a great deal of difference to the fortunes of the chicken farm, but now my power of logical reasoning had left me. All our fortunes seemed to me to center in the hen, now half a field in front of me.

We had been traveling downhill all this time, but at this point we crossed the road and the ground began to rise. I was in that painful condition which occurs when one has lost one's first wind and has not yet got one's second. I was hotter than I had ever been in my life.

Whether the hen, too, was beginning to feel the effects of its run I do not know, but it slowed down to a walk, and even began to peck in a tentative manner at the grass. This assumption on its part that the chase was at an end irritated me. I felt that I should not be worthy of the name of Englishman if I allowed myself to be treated as a cipher by a mere bird. It should realize yet that it was no light matter to be pursued by J. Garnet, author of "The Maneuvers of Arthur," etc.

A judicious increase of pace brought me within a yard or two of my quarry. But it darted from me with a startled exclamation and moved off rapidly up the hill. I followed, distressed. The pace was proving too much for me. The sun blazed down. It seemed to concentrate its rays on my back, to the exclusion of the surrounding scenery, in much the same way as the moon behaves to the heroine of a melodrama. A student of the drama has put it on record that he has seen the moon follow the heroine round the stage, and go off with her (left). The sun was just as attentive to me.

We were on level ground now. The hen had again slowed to a walk, and I was capable of no better pace. Very gradually I closed in on it. There was a high

boxwood hedge in front of us. Just as I came close enough to stake my all on a single grab, the hen dived into this and struggled through in the mysterious way in which birds do get through hedges.

I was in the middle of the obstacle, very hot, tired, and dirty, when from the other side I heard a sudden shout of "Mark over! Bird to the right!" and the next moment I found myself emerging, with a black face and tottering knees, on to the gravel path of a private garden.

Beyond the path was a croquet lawn, on which I perceived, as through a glass darkly, three figures. The mist cleared from my eyes and I recognized two of the trio.

One was my Irish fellow-traveler, the other was his daughter.

The third member of the party was a man, a stranger to me. By some miracle of adroitness he had captured the hen, and was holding it, protesting, in a workman-like manner behind the wings.

THE ENTENTE CORDIALE

Chap_7

I

t has been well observed that there are moments and moments. The present, as far as I was concerned, belonged to the more painful variety.

Even to my exhausted mind it was plain that there was need here for explanations. An Irishman's croquet lawn is his castle, and strangers cannot plunge on to it unannounced through hedges without being prepared to give reasons.

Unfortunately, speech was beyond me. I could have done many things at that moment. I could have emptied a water butt, lain down and gone to sleep, or melted ice with a touch of the finger. But I could not speak. The conversation was opened

by the other man, in whose soothing hand the hen now lay, apparently resigned to its fate.

"Come right in," he said pleasantly. "Don't knock. Your bird, I think?"

I stood there panting. I must have presented a quaint appearance. My hair was full of twigs and other foreign substances. My face was moist and grimy. My mouth hung open. I wanted to sit down. My legs felt as if they had ceased to belong to me.

"I must apologize—" I began, and ended the sentence with gasps.

Conversation languished. The elderly gentleman looked at me with what seemed to me indignant surprise. His daughter looked through me. The man regarded me with a friendly smile, as if I were some old crony dropped in unexpectedly.

"I'm afraid—" I said, and stopped again.

"Hard work, big-game hunting in this weather," said the man. "Take a long breath."

I took several and felt better.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," I said successfully. "Unwarrantable" would have rounded off the sentence nicely, but instinct told me not to risk it. It would have been mere bravado to have attempted unnecessary words of five syllables at that juncture.

I paused.

"Say on," said the man with the hen encouragingly, "I'm a human being just like yourself."

"The fact is," I said, "I didn't—didn't know there was a private garden beyond the hedge. If you will give me my hen—"

"It's hard to say good-by," said the man, stroking the bird's head with the first finger of his disengaged hand. "She and I are just beginning to know and appreciate each other. However, if it must be—"

He extended the hand which held the bird, and at this point a hitch occurred. He did

his part of the business—the letting go. It was in my department—the taking hold—that the thing was bungled. The hen slipped from my grasp like an eel, stood for a moment overcome by the surprise of being at liberty once more, then fled and intrenched itself in some bushes at the farther end of the lawn.

There are times when the most resolute man feels that he can battle no longer with fate; when everything seems against him and the only course left is a dignified retreat. But there is one thing essential to a dignified retreat. One must know the way out. It was that fact which kept me standing there, looking more foolish than anyone has ever looked since the world began. I could hardly ask to be conducted off the premises like the honored guest. Nor would it do to retire by the way I had come. If I could have leaped the hedge with a single bound, that would have made a sufficiently dashing and debonair exit. But the hedge was high, and I was incapable at the moment of achieving a debonair leap over a footstool.

The man saved the situation. He seemed to possess that magnetic power over his fellows which marks the born leader. Under his command we became an organized army. The common object, the pursuit of the hen, made us friends. In the first minute of the proceedings the Irishman was addressing me as "me dear boy," and the other man, who had introduced himself rapidly as Tom Chase, lieutenant in his Majesty's navy, was shouting directions to me by name. I have never assisted at any ceremony at which formality was so completely dispensed with. The ice was not merely broken, it was shivered into a million fragments.

"Go in and drive her out, Garnet," shouted Mr. Chase. "In my direction, if you can. Look out on the left, Phyllis."

Even in that disturbing moment I could not help noticing his use of the Christian name. It seemed to me sinister. I did not like the idea of dashing young lieutenants in the royal navy calling a girl Phyllis whose eyes had haunted me for just over a week—since, in fact, I had first seen them. Nevertheless, I crawled into the bushes

and dislodged the hen. She emerged at the spot where Mr. Chase was waiting with his coat off, and was promptly enveloped in that garment and captured.

"The essence of strategy," observed Mr. Chase approvingly, "is surprise. A devilish neat piece of work."

I thanked him. He deprecated the thanks. He had, he said, only done his duty, as a man is bound to do. He then introduced me to the elderly Irishman, who was, it seemed, a professor—of what I do not know—at Dublin University. By name, Derrick. He informed me that he always spent the summer at Lyme Regis.

"I was surprised to see you at Lyme Regis," I said. "When you got out at Yeovil, I thought I had seen the last of you."

I think I am gifted beyond other men as regards the unfortunate turning of sentences.

"I meant," I added speedily, "I was afraid I had."

"Ah, of course," he said, "you were in our carriage coming down. I was confident I had seen you before. I never forget a face."

"It would be a kindness," said Mr. Chase, "if you would forget Garnet's as now exhibited. You'll excuse the personality, but you seem to have collected a good deal of the professor's property coming through that hedge."

"I was wondering," I said with gratitude. "A wash—if I might?"

"Of course, me boy, of course," said the professor. "Tom, take Mr. Garnet off to your room, and then we'll have some lunch. You'll stay to lunch, Mr. Garnet?"

I thanked him for his kindness and went off with my friend, the lieutenant, to the house. We imprisoned the hen in the stables, to its profound indignation, gave directions for lunch to be served to it, and made our way to Mr. Chase's room.

"So you've met the professor before?" he said, hospitably laying out a change of raiment for me—we were fortunately much of a height and build.

"I have never spoken to him," I said. "We traveled down together in a very full

carriage, and I saw him next day on the beach."

"He's a dear old boy, if you rub him the right way."

"Yes?" I said.

"But—I'm telling you this for your good and guidance—he can cut up rough. And when he does, he goes off like a four point seven. I think, if I were you—you don't mind my saying this?—I think, if I were you, I should not mention Mr. Tim Healy at lunch."

I promised that I would try to resist the temptation.

"And if you could manage not to discuss home rule—"

"I will make an effort."

"On any other topic he will be delighted to hear your views. Chatty remarks on bimetallism would meet with his earnest attention. A lecture on what to do with the cold mutton would be welcomed. But not Ireland, if you don't mind. Shall we go down?"

We got to know one another very well at lunch.

"Do you hunt hens," asked Mr. Chase, who was mixing the salad—he was one of those men who seem to do everything a shade better than anyone else, "for amusement or by your doctor's orders?"

"Neither," I said, "and particularly not for amusement. The fact is I have been lured down here by a friend of mine who has started a chicken farm—"

I was interrupted. All three of them burst into laughter. Mr. Chase in his emotion allowed the vinegar to trickle on to the cloth, missing the salad bowl by a clear two inches.

"You don't mean to tell us," he said, "that you really come from the one and only chicken farm?"

I could not deny it.

"Why, you're the man we've all been praying to meet for days past. Haven't we, professor?"

"You're right, Tom," chuckled Mr. Derrick.

"We want to know all about it, Mr. Garnet," said Phyllis Derrick.

"Do you know," continued Mr. Chase, "that you are the talk of the town? Everybody is discussing you. Your methods are quite new and original, aren't they?"

"Probably," I replied. "Ukridge knows nothing about fowls. I know less. He considers it an advantage. He said our minds ought to be unbiased by any previous experience."

"Ukridge!" said the professor. "That was the name old Dawlish, the grocer, said. I never forget a name. He is the gentleman who lectures on the breeding of poultry, is he not? You do not?"

I hastened to disclaim any such feat.

"His lectures are very popular," said Phyllis with a little splutter of mirth.

"He enjoys them," I said.

"Look here, Garnet," said Mr. Chase, "I hope you won't consider all these questions impertinent, but you've no notion of the thrilling interest we all take—at a distance—in your farm. We have been talking of nothing else for a week. I have dreamed of it three nights running. Is Mr. Ukridge doing this as a commercial speculation, or is he an eccentric millionaire?"

"He's not a millionaire. I believe he intends to be, though, before long, with the assistance of the fowls. But I hope you won't look on me as in any way responsible for the arrangements at the farm. I am merely a laborer. The brain work of the business lies in Ukridge's department."

"Tell me, Mr. Garnet," said Phyllis, "do you use an incubator?"

"Oh, yes, we have an incubator."

"I suppose you find it very useful?"

"I'm afraid we use it chiefly for drying our boots when they get wet," I said.

Only that morning Ukridge's spare pair of tennis shoes had permanently spoiled the future of half-a-dozen eggs which were being hatched on the spot where the shoes happened to be placed. Ukridge had been quite annoyed.

"I came down here principally," I said, "in search of golf. I was told there were links, but up to the present my professional duties have monopolized me."

"Golf," said Professor Derrick. "Why, yes. We must have a round or two together. I am very fond of golf. I generally spend the summer down here improving my game."

I said I should be delighted.

There was croquet after lunch—a game at which I am a poor performer. Miss Derrick and I played the professor and Chase. Chase was a little better than myself; the professor, by dint of extreme earnestness and care, managed to play a fair game; and Phyllis was an expert.

"I was reading a book," said she, as we stood together watching the professor shaping at his ball at the other end of the lawn, "by an author of the same surname as you, Mr. Garnet. Is he a relation of yours?"

"I am afraid I am the person, Miss Derrick," I said.

"You wrote the book?"

"A man must live," I said apologetically.

"Then you must have—oh, nothing."

"I could not help it, I'm afraid. But your criticism was very kind."

"Did you know what I was going to say?"

"I guessed."

"It was lucky I liked it," she said with a smile.

"Lucky for me," I said.

"Why?"

"It will encourage me to write another book. So you see what you have to answer for. I hope it will not trouble your conscience."

At the other end of the lawn the professor was still patting the balls about, Chase the while advising him to allow for windage and elevation and other mysterious things.

"I should not have thought," she said, "that an author cared a bit for the opinion of an amateur."

"It all depends."

"On the author?"

"On the amateur."

It was my turn to play at this point. I missed—as usual.

"I didn't like your heroine, Mr. Garnet."

"That was the one crumpled rose leaf. I have been wondering why ever since. I tried to make her nice. Three of the critics liked her."

"Really?"

"And the modern reviewer is an intelligent young man. What is a 'creature,' Miss Derrick?"

"Pamela in your book is a creature," she replied unsatisfactorily, with the slightest tilt of the chin.

"My next heroine shall be a triumph," I said.

She should be a portrait, I resolved, from life.

Shortly after, the game came somehow to an end. I do not understand the intricacies of croquet. But Phyllis did something brilliant and remarkable with the balls, and we

adjourned for tea, which had been made ready at the edge of the lawn while we played.

The sun was setting as I left to return to the farm, with the hen stored neatly in a basket in my hand. The air was deliciously cool and full of that strange quiet which follows soothingly on the skirts of a broiling midsummer afternoon. Far away—the sound seemed almost to come from another world—the tinkle of a sheep bell made itself heard, deepening the silence. Alone in a sky of the palest blue there twinkled a small bright star.

I addressed this star.

"She was certainly very nice to me," I said. "Very nice, indeed."

The star said nothing.

"On the other hand," I went on, "I don't like that naval man. He is a good chap, but he overdoes it."

The star winked sympathetically.

"He calls her Phyllis," I said.

"Charawk," said the hen satirically from her basket.

A LITTLE DINNER

Chap_8

E

dwin comes to-day," said Mrs. Ukridge.

"And the Derricks," said Ukridge, sawing at the bread in his energetic way. "Don't forget the Derricks, Millie."

"No, dear. Mrs. Beale is going to give us a very nice dinner. We talked it over yesterday."

"Who is Edwin?" I asked.

We were finishing breakfast on the second morning after my visit to the Derricks. I had related my adventures to the staff of the farm on my return, laying stress on the merits of our neighbors and their interest in our doings, and the hired retainer had been sent off next morning with a note from Mrs. Ukridge, inviting them to look over the farm and stay to dinner.

"Edwin?" said Ukridge. "Beast of a cat."

"O Stanley!" said Mrs. Ukridge plaintively. "He's not. He's such a dear, Mr. Garnet. A beautiful, pure-bred Persian. He has taken prizes."

"He's always taking something—generally food. That's why he didn't come down with us."

"A great, horrid beast of a dog bit him, Mr. Garnet." Mrs. Ukridge's eyes became round and shining. "And poor Edwin had to go to a cats' hospital."

"And I hope," said Ukridge, "the experience will do him good. Sneaked a dog's bone, Garnet, under his very nose, if you please. Naturally, the dog lodged a protest."

"I'm so afraid that he will be frightened of Bob. He will be very timid, and Bob's so exceedingly boisterous. Isn't he, Mr. Garnet?"

I owned that Bob's manner was not that of a Vere de Vere.

"That's all right," said Ukridge; "Bob won't hurt him, unless he tries to steal his bone. In that case we will have Edwin made into a rug."

"Stanley doesn't like Edwin," said Mrs. Ukridge plaintively.

Edwin arrived early in the afternoon, and was shut into the kitchen. He struck me as a handsome cat, but nervous. He had an excited eye.

The Derricks followed two hours later. Mr. Chase was not of the party.

"Tom had to go to London," explained the professor, "or he would have been

delighted to come. It was a disappointment to the boy, for he wanted to see the farm."

"He must come some other time," said Ukridge. "We invite inspection. Look here," he broke off suddenly—we were nearing the fowl run now, Mrs. Ukridge walking in front with Phyllis Derrick—"were you ever at Bristol?"

"Never, sir," said the professor.

"Because I knew just such another fat little buffer there a few years ago. Gay old bird, he was. He—"

"This is the fowl run, professor," I broke in, with a moist, tingling feeling across my forehead and up my spine. I saw the professor stiffen as he walked, while his face deepened in color. Ukridge's breezy way of expressing himself is apt to electrify the stranger.

"You will notice the able way—ha, ha!—in which the wire netting is arranged," I continued feverishly. "Took some doing, that. By Jove! yes. It was hot work. Nice lot of fowls, aren't they? Rather a mixed lot, of course. Ha, ha! That's the dealer's fault, though. We are getting quite a number of eggs now. Hens wouldn't lay at first. Couldn't make them."

I babbled on till from the corner of my eye I saw the flush fade from the professor's face and his back gradually relax its pokerlike attitude. The situation was saved for the moment, but there was no knowing what further excesses Ukridge might indulge in. I managed to draw him aside as we went through the fowl run, and expostulated.

"For goodness' sake, be careful," I whispered. "You've no notion how touchy the professor is."

"But I said nothing," he replied, amazed.

"Hang it, you know, nobody likes to be called a fat little buffer to his face."

"What else could I call him? Nobody minds a little thing like that. We can't be stilted

and formal. It's ever so much more friendly to relax and be chummy."

Here we rejoined the others, and I was left with a leaden foreboding of grewsome things in store. I knew what manner of man Ukridge was when he relaxed and became chummy. Friendships of years' standing had failed to survive the test.

For the time being, however, all went well. In his rôle of lecturer he offended no one, and Phyllis and her father behaved admirably. They received the strangest theories without a twitch of the mouth.

"Ah," the professor would say, "now, is that really so? Very interesting, indeed."

Only once, when Ukridge was describing some more than usually original device for the furthering of the interests of his fowls, did a slight spasm disturb Phyllis's look of attentive reverence.

"And you have really had no previous experience in chicken farming?" she said.

"None," said Ukridge, beaming through his glasses, "not an atom. But I can turn my hand to anything, you know. Things seem to come naturally to me, somehow."

"I see," said Phyllis.

It was while matters were progressing with such beautiful smoothness that I observed the square form of the hired retainer approaching us. Somehow—I cannot say why—I had a feeling that he came with bad news. Perhaps it was his air of quiet satisfaction which struck me as ominous.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Ukridge, sir."

Ukridge was in the middle of a very eloquent excursus on the feeding of fowls. The interruption annoyed him.

"Well, Beale," he said, "what is it?"

"That there cat, sir, what came to-day."

"O Beale," cried Mrs. Ukridge in agitation, "what has happened?"

"Having something to say to the missus—"

"What has happened? O Beale, don't say that Edwin has been hurt? Where is he? Oh, poor Edwin!"

"Having something to say to the missus—"

"If Bob has bitten him, I hope he had his nose well scratched," said Mrs. Ukridge vindictively.

"Having something to say to the missus," resumed the hired retainer tranquilly, "I went into the kitchen ten minutes back. The cat was sitting on the mat."

Beale's narrative style closely resembled that of a certain book I had read in my infancy. I wish I could remember its title. It was a well-written book.

"Yes, Beale, yes?" said Mrs. Ukridge. "Oh, do go on!"

"'Halloo, puss,' I says to him, 'and 'ow are you, sir?' 'Be careful,' says the missus. "E's that timid,' she says, 'you wouldn't believe,' she says. "E's only just settled down, as you may say,' she says. 'Ho, don't you fret,' I says to her, "im and me we understands each other. 'Im and me,' I says, 'is old friends. 'E's me dear old pal, Corporal Banks, of the Skrimshankers.' She grinned at that, ma'am, Corporal Banks being a man we'd 'ad many a 'earty laugh at in the old days. 'E was, in a manner of speaking, a joke between us."

"Oh, do—go—on, Beale! What has happened to Edwin?"

The hired retainer proceeded in calm, even tones.

"We was talking there, ma'am, when Bob, which had followed me unknown, trotted in. When the cat ketched sight of 'im sniffing about, there was such a spitting and swearing as you never 'eard, and blowed," said Mr. Beale amusedly, as if the recollection tickled him, "blowed if the old cat didn't give one jump and move in quick time up the chimley, where 'e now remains, paying no 'eed to the missus's attempts to get him down again."

Sensation, as they say in the reports.

"But he'll be cooked," cried Phyllis, open-eyed.

Ukridge uttered a roar of dismay.

"No, he won't. Nor will our dinner. Mrs. Beale always lets the kitchen fire out during the afternoon. It's a cold dinner we'll get to-night, if that cat doesn't come down."

The professor's face fell. I had remarked on the occasion when I had lunched with him his evident fondness for the pleasures of the table. Cold, impromptu dinners were plainly not to his taste.

We went to the kitchen in a body. Mrs. Beale was standing in front of the empty grate making seductive cat noises up the chimney.

"What's all this, Mrs. Beale?" said Ukridge.

"I've only bin and drove 'im further up," said Mrs. Beale. "I've only bin and drove 'im further up," said Mrs. Beale.

"He won't come down, sir, not while he thinks Bob's about. And how I'm to cook dinner for five with him up the chimney I don't see, sir."

"Prod at him with a broom handle, Mrs. Beale," urged Ukridge.

"I 'ave tried that, sir, but I can't reach him, and I've only bin and drove 'im further up. What must be," added Mrs. Beale philosophically, "must be. He may come down of his own accord in the night. Bein' 'ungry."

"Then what we must do," said Ukridge in a jovial manner which to me at least seemed out of place, "is to have a regular, jolly, picnic dinner, what? Whack up whatever we have in the larder, and eat that."

"A regular, jolly, picnic dinner," repeated the professor gloomily. I could read what was passing in his mind.

"That will be delightful," said Phyllis.

"Er—I think, my dear sir," said her father, "it would be hardly fair of us to give any further trouble to Mrs. Ukridge and yourself. If you will allow me, therefore, I

will—"

Ukridge became gushingly hospitable. He refused to think of allowing his guests to go empty away. He would be able to whack up something, he said. There was quite a good deal of the ham left, he was sure. He appealed to me to indorse his view that there was a tin of sardines and part of a cold fowl and plenty of bread and cheese.

"And after all," he said, speaking for the whole company in the generous, comprehensive way enthusiasts have, "what more do we want in weather like this? A nice, light, cold dinner is ever so much better for us than a lot of hot things."

The professor said nothing. He looked wan and unhappy.

We strolled out again into the garden, but somehow things seemed to drag. Conversation was fitful, except on the part of Ukridge, who continued to talk easily on all subjects, unconscious of the fact that the party was depressed, and at least one of his guests rapidly becoming irritable. I watched the professor furtively as Ukridge talked on, and that ominous phrase of Mr. Chase's concerning four-point-seven guns kept coming into my mind. If Ukridge were to tread on any of his pet corns, as he might at any minute, there would be an explosion. The snatching of the dinner from his very mouth, as it were, and the substitution of a bread-and-cheese and sardines menu had brought him to the frame of mind when men turn and rend their nearest and dearest.

The sight of the table, when at length we filed into the dining room, sent a chill through me. It was a meal for the very young or the very hungry. The uncompromising coldness and solidity of the viands was enough to appall a man conscious that his digestion needed humoring. A huge cheese faced us in almost a swash-buckling way, and I noticed that the professor shivered slightly as he saw it. Sardines, looking more oily and uninviting than anything I had ever seen, appeared in their native tin beyond the loaf of bread. There was a ham, in its third quarter, and a chicken which had suffered heavily during a previous visit to the table.

We got through the meal somehow, and did our best to delude ourselves into the idea that it was all great fun, but it was a shallow pretense. The professor was very silent by the time we had finished. Ukridge had been terrible. When the professor began a story—his stories would have been the better for a little more briskness and condensation—Ukridge interrupted him before he had got halfway through, without a word of apology, and began some anecdote of his own. He disagreed with nearly every opinion he expressed. It is true that he did it all in such a perfectly friendly way, and was obviously so innocent of any intention of giving offense, that another man might have overlooked the matter. But the professor, robbed of his good dinner, was at the stage when he had to attack somebody. Every moment I had been expecting the storm to burst.

It burst after dinner.

We were strolling in the garden when some demon urged Ukridge, apropos of the professor's mention of Dublin, to start upon the Irish question. My heart stood still.

Ukridge had boomed forth some very positive opinions of his own on the subject of Ireland before I could get near enough to him to stop him. When I did, I suppose I must have whispered louder than I had intended, for the professor heard my words, and they acted as the match to the powder.

"He's touchy on the Irish question, is he?" he thundered. "Drop it, is it? And why? Why, sir? I'm one of the best-tempered men that ever came from Ireland, let me tell you, and I will not stay here to be insulted by the insinuation that I cannot discuss Irish affairs as calmly as anyone."

"But, professor—"

"Take your hand off my arm, Mr. Garnet. I will not be treated like a child. I am as competent to discuss the affairs of Ireland without heat as any man, let me tell you."

"Father—"

"And let me tell you, Mr. Ukridge, that I consider your opinions poisonous.

Poisonous, sir. And you know nothing whatever about the subject, sir. I don't wish to see you or to speak to you again. Understand that, sir. Our acquaintance began to-day, and it will cease to-day. Good night to you. Come, Phyllis, me dear. Mrs. Ukridge, good night."

Mr. Chase, when he spoke of four-point-seven guns, had known what he was talking about.

DIES IRÆ

Chap_9

W

hy is it, I wonder, that stories of Retribution calling at the wrong address strike us as funny instead of pathetic? I myself had been amused by them many a time. In a book which I had just read, a shop woman, being vexed with an omnibus conductor, had thrown a superannuated orange at him. It had found its billet not on him, but on a perfectly inoffensive spectator. The missile, we are told, "'it a young copper full in the hyeball." I had enjoyed this when I read it, but now that fate had arranged a precisely similar situation, with myself in the rôle of the young copper, the fun of the thing appealed to me not at all.

It was Ukridge who was to blame for the professor's regrettable explosion and departure, and he ought by all laws of justice to have suffered for it. As it was, I was the only person materially affected. It did not matter to Ukridge. He did not care twopence one way or the other. If the professor were friendly, he was willing to talk to him by the hour on any subject, pleasant or unpleasant. If, on the other hand, he wished to have nothing more to do with us, it did not worry him. He was content to let him go. Ukridge was a self-sufficing person.

But to me it was a serious matter. More than serious. If I have done my work as historian with any adequate degree of skill, the reader should have gathered by this

time the state of my feelings.

My love had grown with the days. Mr. J. Holt Schooling, or somebody else with a taste for juggling with figures, might write a very readable page or so of statistics in connection with the growth of love in the heart of a man. In some cases it is, I believe, slow. In my own I can only say that Jack's beanstalk was a backward plant in comparison. It is true that we had not seen a great deal of one another, and that, when we had met, our interviews had been brief and our conversation conventional; but it is the intervals between the meetings that do the real damage. Absence, as the poet neatly remarks, makes the heart grow fonder. And now, thanks to Ukridge's amazing idiocy, a barrier had been thrust between us. As if the business of fishing for a girl's heart were not sufficiently difficult and delicate without the addition of needless obstacles! It was terrible to have to reëstablish myself in the good graces of the professor before I could so much as begin to dream of Phyllis.

Ukridge gave me no balm.

"Well, after all," he said, when I pointed out to him quietly but plainly my opinion of his tactlessness, "what does it matter? There are other people in the world besides the old buffer. And we haven't time to waste making friends, as a matter of fact. The farm ought to keep us busy. I've noticed, Garny, old boy, that you haven't seemed such a whale for work lately as you might be. You must buckle to, old horse. We are at a critical stage. On our work now depends the success of the speculation. Look at those cocks. They're always fighting. Fling a stone at them. What's the matter with you? Can't get the novel off your chest, what? You take my tip, and give your mind a rest. Nothing like manual labor for clearing the brain. All the doctors say so. Those coops ought to be painted to-day or to-morrow. Mind you, I think old Derrick would be all right if one persevered—"

"And didn't call him a fat old buffer, and contradict everything he said and spoil all his stories by breaking in with chestnuts of your own in the middle," I interrupted

with bitterness.

"Oh, rot, old boy! He didn't mind being called a fat old buffer. You keep harping on that. A man likes one to be chatty with him. What was the matter with old Derrick was a touch of liver. You should have stopped him taking that cheese. I say, old man, just fling another stone at those cocks, will you? They'll eat one another."

I had hoped, fearing the while that there was not much chance of such a thing happening, that the professor might get over his feeling of injury during the night, and be as friendly as ever next day. But he was evidently a man who had no objection whatever to letting the sun go down upon his wrath, for, when I met him on the beach the following morning, he cut me in the most uncompromising fashion.

Phyllis was with him at the time, and also another girl who was, I supposed from the strong likeness between them, her sister. She had the same soft mass of brown hair. But to me she appeared almost commonplace in comparison.

It is never pleasant to be cut dead. It produces the same sort of feeling as is experienced when one treads on nothing where one imagined a stair to be. In the present instance the pang was mitigated to a certain extent—not largely—by the fact that Phyllis looked at me. She did not move her head, and I could not have declared positively that she moved her eyes; but nevertheless she certainly looked at me. It was something. She seemed to say that duty compelled her to follow her father's lead, and that the act must not be taken as evidence of any personal animus.

That, at least, was how I read off the message.

Two days later I met Mr. Chase in the village.

"Halloo! so you're back," I said.

"You've discovered my secret," said he. "Will you have a cigar or a cocoanut?"

There was a pause.

"Trouble, I hear, while I was away," he said.

I nodded.

"The man I live with, Ukridge, did it. Touched on the Irish question."

"Home rule?"

"He mentioned it among other things."

"And the professor went off?"

"Like a bomb."

"He would. It's a pity."

I agreed.

I am glad to say that I suppressed the desire to ask him to use his influence, if any, with Professor Derrick to effect a reconciliation. I felt that I must play the game.

"I ought not to be speaking to you, you know," said Mr. Chase. "You're under arrest."

"He's still—" I stopped for a word.

"Very much so. I'll do what I can."

"It's very good of you."

"But the time is not yet ripe. He may be said at present to be simmering down."

"I see. Thanks. Good-by."

"So long."

And Mr. Chase walked on with long strides to the Cob.

The days passed slowly. I saw nothing more of Phyllis or her sister. The professor I met once or twice on the links. I had taken earnestly to golf in this time of stress. Golf, it has been said, is the game of disappointed lovers. On the other hand, it has further been pointed out that it does not follow that, because a man is a failure as a lover, he will be any good at all on the links. My game was distinctly poor at first. But a round or two put me back into my proper form, which is fair. The professor's

demeanor at these accidental meetings on the links was a faithful reproduction of his attitude on the beach. Only by a studied imitation of the absolute stranger did he show that he had observed my presence.

Once or twice after dinner, when Ukridge was smoking one of his special cigars while Mrs. Ukridge petted Edwin (now moving in society once more, and in his right mind), I walked out across the fields through the cool summer night till I came to the hedge that shut off the Derricks' grounds. Not the hedge through which I had made my first entrance, but another, lower, and nearer the house. Standing there under the shade of a tree I could see the lighted windows of the drawing-room.

Generally there was music inside, and, the windows being opened on account of the warmth of the night, I was able to make myself a little more miserable by hearing Phyllis sing. It deepened the feeling of banishment.

I shall never forget those furtive visits. The intense stillness of the night, broken by an occasional rustling in the grass or the hedge; the smell of the flowers in the garden beyond; the distant drone of the sea.

"God makes sech nights, all white and still, Fur'z you can look and listen."

Another day had generally begun before I moved from my hiding place, and started for home, surprised to find my limbs stiff and my clothes bathed with dew.

Life seemed a poor institution during these days.

I ENLIST A MINION'S SERVICES

Chap_10

I

t would be interesting to know to what extent the work of authors is influenced by their private affairs. If life is flowing smoothly for them, are the novels they write in that period of content colored with optimism? And if things are running crosswise,

do they work off the resultant gloom on their faithful public? If, for instance, Mr. W. W. Jacobs had toothache, would he write like Mr. Hall Caine? If Maxim Gorky were invited to lunch by the Czar, would he sit down and dash off a trifle in the vein of Mr. Dooley? Probably great authors have the power of detaching their writing self from their living, workaday self. For my own part, the frame of mind in which I now found myself completely altered the scheme of my novel. I had designed it as a light-comedy effort. Here and there a page or two to steady the reader, and show him what I could do in the way of pathos if I cared to try; but in the main a thing of sunshine and laughter. But now great slabs of gloom began to work themselves into the scheme of it. Characters whom I had hitherto looked upon as altogether robust developed fatal illnesses. A magnificent despondency became the keynote of the book. Instead of marrying, my hero and heroine had a big scene in the last chapter, at the end of which she informed him that she was already secretly wedded to another, a man with whom she had not even a sporting chance of being happy. I could see myself correcting proofs made pulpy by the tears of emotional printers.

It would not do. I felt that I must make a determined effort to shake off my depression. More than ever the need for conciliating the professor was borne in upon me. Day and night I spurred my brain to think of some suitable means of engineering a reconciliation.

In the meantime I worked hard among the fowls, drove furiously on the links, and swam about the harbor when the affairs of the farm did not require my attention.

Things were not going very well on our model chicken farm. Little accidents marred the harmony of life in the fowl run. On one occasion a hen fell into a pot of tar, and came out an unspeakable object. Chickens kept straying into the wrong coops, and, in accordance with fowl etiquette, were promptly pecked to death by the resident. Edwin murdered a couple of Wyandottes, and was only saved from execution by the tears of Mrs. Ukridge.

In spite of these occurrences, however, his buoyant optimism never deserted Ukridge. They were incidents, annoying, but in no way affecting the prosperity of the farm.

Things were not going very well on our model chicken farm. Things were not going very well on our model chicken farm.

"After all," he said, "what's one bird more or less? Yes, I know I was angry when that beast of a cat lunched off those two, but that was more for the principle of the thing. I'm not going to pay large sums for chickens so that a beastly cat can lunch well. Still, we've plenty left, and the eggs are coming in better now, though we've a deal of leeway to make up yet in that line. I got a letter from Whiteley's this morning asking when my first consignment was to arrive. You know, these people make a mistake in hurrying a man. It annoys him. It irritates him. When we really get going, Garny, my boy, I shall drop Whiteley's. I shall cut them out of my list, and send my eggs to their trade rivals. They shall have a sharp lesson. It's a little hard. Here am I, worked to death looking after things down here, and these men have the impertinence to bother me about their wretched business!"

It was on the morning after this that I heard him calling me in a voice in which I detected agitation. I was strolling about the paddock, as was my habit after breakfast, thinking about Phyllis and my wretched novel. I had just framed a more than usually murky scene for use in the earlier part of the book, when Ukridge shouted to me from the fowl run.

"Garnet, come here," he cried, "I want you to see the most astounding thing."

I joined him.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Blest if I know. Look at those chickens. They've been doing that for the last half hour."

I inspected the chickens. There was certainly something the matter with them. They

were yawning broadly, as if we bored them. They stood about singly and in groups, opening and shutting their beaks. It was an uncanny spectacle.

"What's the matter with them?"

"It looks to me," I said, "as if they were tired of life. They seem hipped."

"Oh, do look at that poor little brown one by the coop," said Mrs. Ukridge sympathetically, "I'm sure it's not well. See, it's lying down. What can be the matter with it?"

"Can a chicken get a fit of the blues?" I asked. "Because, if so, that's what they've got. I never saw a more bored-looking lot of birds."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Ukridge. "We'll ask Beale. He once lived with an aunt who kept fowls. He'll know all about it. Beale!"

No answer.

"Beale!!"

A sturdy form in shirt sleeves appeared through the bushes, carrying a boot. We seemed to have interrupted him in the act of cleaning it.

"Beale, you know about fowls. What's the matter with these chickens?"

The hired retainer examined the blasé birds with a wooden expression on his face.

"Well?" said Ukridge.

"The 'ole thing 'ere," said the hired retainer, "is these 'ere fowls have bin and got the roop."

I had never heard of the disease before, but it sounded quite horrifying.

"Is that what makes them yawn like that?" said Mrs. Ukridge.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Poor things!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"And have they all got it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What ought we to do?" asked Ukridge.

The hired retainer perpended.

"Well, my aunt, sir, when 'er fowls 'ad the roop, she give them snuff. Give them snuff, she did," he repeated with relish, "every morning."

"Snuff!" said Mrs. Ukridge.

"Yes, ma'am. She give them snuff till their eyes bubbled."

Mrs. Ukridge uttered a faint squeak at this vivid piece of word painting.

"And did it cure them?" asked Ukridge.

"No, sir," responded the expert soothingly. "They died."

"Oh, go away, Beale, and clean your beastly boots," said Ukridge. "You're no use. Wait a minute. Who would know about this infernal roop thing? One of those farmer chaps would, I suppose. Beale, go off to farmer Leigh at Up Lyme, and give him my compliments, and ask him what he does when his fowls get the roop."

"Yes, sir."

"No, I'll go, Ukridge," I said, "I want some exercise."

I whistled to Bob, who was investigating a mole heap in the paddock, and set off to consult farmer Leigh. He had sold us some fowls shortly after our arrival, so might be expected to feel a kindly interest in their ailing families.

The path to Up Lyme lies across deep-grassed meadows. At intervals it passes over a stream by means of foot bridges. The stream curls through the meadows like a snake.

And at the first of these bridges I met Phyllis.

I came upon her quite suddenly. The other end of the bridge was hidden from my

view. I could hear somebody coming through the grass, but not till I was on the bridge did I see who it was. We reached the bridge simultaneously. She was alone. She carried a sketching block. All nice girls sketch a little.

There was room for one alone on the foot bridge, and I drew back to let her pass.

As it is the privilege of woman to make the first sign of recognition, I said nothing. I merely lifted my hat in a noncommitting fashion.

"Are you going to cut me, I wonder?" I said to myself.

She answered the unspoken question as I hoped it would be answered.

"Mr. Garnet," she said, stopping at the end of the bridge.

"Miss Derrick?"

"I couldn't tell you so before, but I am so sorry this has happened."

"You are very kind," I said, realizing as I said it the miserable inadequacy of the English language. At a crisis when I would have given a month's income to have said something neat, epigrammatic, suggestive, yet withal courteous and respectful, I could only find a hackneyed, unenthusiastic phrase which I should have used in accepting an invitation from a bore to lunch with him at his club.

"Of course you understand my friends must be my father's friends."

"Yes," I said gloomily, "I suppose so."

"So you must not think me rude if I—I—"

"Cut me," said I with masculine coarseness.

"Don't seem to see you," said she, with feminine delicacy, "when I am with my father. You will understand?"

"I shall understand."

"You see"—she smiled—"you are under arrest, as Tom says."

Tom!

"I see," I said.

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

I watched her out of sight, and went on to interview Mr. Leigh.

We had a long and intensely uninteresting conversation about the maladies to which chickens are subject. He was verbose and reminiscent. He took me over his farm, pointing out as he went Dorkings and Cochin Chinas which he had cured of diseases generally fatal, with, as far as I could gather, Christian Science principles.

I left at last with instructions to paint the throats of the stricken birds with turpentine—a task imagination boggled at, and one which I proposed to leave exclusively to Ukridge and the hired retainer. As I had a slight headache, a visit to the Cob would, I thought, do me good. I had missed my bath that morning, and was in need of a breath of sea air.

It was high tide, and there was deep water on three sides of the Cob.

In a small boat in the offing Professor Derrick appeared, fishing. I had seen him engaged in this pursuit once or twice before. His only companion was a gigantic boatman, by name Harry Hawk.

I sat on the seat at the end of the Cob, and watched the professor. It was an instructive sight, an object lesson to those who hold that optimism has died out of the race. I had never seen him catch a fish. He did not look to me as if he were at all likely to catch a fish. Yet he persevered.

There are few things more restful than to watch some one else busy under a warm sun. As I sat there, my mind ranged idly over large subjects and small. I thought of love and chicken farming. I mused on the immortality of the soul. In the end I always returned to the professor. Sitting, as I did, with my back to the beach, I could see nothing but his boat. It had the ocean to itself.

I began to ponder over the professor. I wondered dreamily if he were very hot. I tried to picture his boyhood. I speculated on his future, and the pleasure he extracted from life.

It was only when I heard him call out to Hawk to be careful, when a movement on the part of that oarsman set the boat rocking, that I began to weave romances round him in which I myself figured.

But, once started, I progressed rapidly. I imagined a sudden upset. Professor struggling in water. Myself (heroically): "Courage! I'm coming!" A few rapid strokes. Saved! Sequel: A subdued professor, dripping salt water and tears of gratitude, urging me to become his son-in-law. That sort of thing happened in fiction. It was a shame that it should not happen in real life. In my hot youth I once had seven stories in seven weekly penny papers in the same month all dealing with a situation of the kind. Only the details differed. In "Not Really a Coward," Vincent Devereux had rescued the earl's daughter from a fire, whereas in "Hilda's Hero" it was the peppery old father whom Tom Slingsby saved. Singularly enough, from drowning. In other words, I, a very mediocre scribbler, had effected seven times in a single month what the powers of the universe could not manage once, even on the smallest scale.

I was a little annoyed with the powers of the universe.

It was at precisely three minutes to twelve—for I had just consulted my watch—that the great idea surged into my brain. At four minutes to twelve I had been grumbling impotently at Providence. By two minutes to twelve I had determined upon a manly and independent course of action.

Briefly, it was this. Since dramatic accident and rescue would not happen of its own accord, I would arrange one for myself. Hawk looked to me the sort of man who would do anything in a friendly way for a few shillings.

That afternoon I interviewed Mr. Hawk at the Net and Mackerel.

"Hawk," I said to him darkly, over a mystic and conspirator-like pot, "I want you, the next time you take Professor Derrick out fishing"—here I glanced round, to make sure that we were not overheard—"to upset him."

His astonished face rose slowly from the rim of the pot, like a full moon.

"What 'ud I do that for?" he gasped.

"Five shillings, I hope," said I; "but I am prepared to go to ten."

He gurgled.

I argued with the man. I was eloquent, but at the same time concise. My choice of words was superb. I crystallized my ideas into pithy sentences which a child could have understood.

At the end of half an hour he had grasped all the salient points of the scheme. Also he imagined that I wished the professor upset by way of a practical joke. He gave me to understand that this was the type of humor which was to be expected from a gentleman from London. I am afraid he must at one period of his career have lived at one of those watering places to which trippers congregate. He did not seem to think highly of the Londoner.

I let it rest at that. I could not give my true reason, and this served as well as any.

At the last moment he recollected that he, too, would get wet when the accident took place, and raised his price to a sovereign.

A mercenary man. It is painful to see how rapidly the old simple spirit is dying out in rural districts. Twenty years ago a fisherman would have been charmed to do a little job like that for a shilling.

THE BRAVE PRESERVER

Chap_11

I

could have wished, during the next few days, that Mr. Harry Hawk's attitude toward myself had not been so unctuously confidential and mysterious. It was unnecessary, in my opinion, for him to grin meaningly whenever he met me in the street. His sly wink when we passed each other on the Cob struck me as in indifferent taste. The thing had been definitely arranged (half down and half when it was over), and there was no need for any cloak and dark-lantern effects. I objected strongly to being treated as the villain of a melodrama. I was merely an ordinary well-meaning man, forced by circumstances into doing the work of Providence. Mr. Hawk's demeanor seemed to say:

"We are two reckless scoundrels, but bless you, I won't give away your guilty secret."

The climax came one morning as I was going along the street toward the beach. I was passing a dark doorway, when out shimmered Mr. Hawk as if he had been a specter instead of the most substantial man within a radius of ten miles.

"St!" he whispered.

"Now look here, Hawk," I said wrathfully, for the start he had given me had made me bite my tongue, "this has got to stop. I refuse to be haunted in this way. What is it now?"

"Mr. Derrick goes out this morning, zur."

"Thank goodness for that," I said. "Get it over this morning, then, without fail. I couldn't stand another day of this."

I went on to the Cob, where I sat down. I was excited. Deeds of great import must shortly be done. I felt a little nervous. It would never do to bungle the thing. Suppose by some accident I were to drown the professor, or suppose that, after all, he contented himself with a mere formal expression of thanks and refused to let bygones be bygones. These things did not bear thinking of.

I got up and began to pace restlessly to and fro.

Presently from the farther end of the harbor there put off Mr. Hawk's boat, bearing its precious cargo. My mouth became dry with excitement.

Very slowly Mr. Hawk pulled round the end of the Cob, coming to a standstill some dozen yards from where I was performing my beat. It was evidently here that the scene of the gallant rescue had been fixed.

My eyes were glued upon Mr. Hawk's broad back. The boat lay almost motionless on the water. I had never seen the sea smoother.

It seemed as if this perfect calm might continue for ever. Mr. Hawk made no movement. Then suddenly the whole scene changed to one of vast activity. I heard Mr. Hawk utter a hoarse cry, and saw him plunge violently in his seat. The professor turned half round, and I caught sight of his indignant face, pink with emotion. Then the scene changed again with the rapidity of a dissolving view. I saw Mr. Hawk give another plunge, and the next moment the boat was upside down in the water, and I was shooting head foremost to the bottom, oppressed with the indescribably clammy sensation which comes when one's clothes are thoroughly wet.

I rose to the surface close to the upturned boat. The first sight I saw was the spluttering face of Mr. Hawk. I ignored him and swam to where the professor's head bobbed on the waters.

"Keep cool," I said. A silly remark in the circumstances.

He was swimming energetically but unskillfully. In his shore clothes it would have taken him at least a week to struggle to land.

I knew all about saving people from drowning. We used to practice it with a dummy in the swimming bath at school. I attacked him from the rear and got a good grip of him by the shoulders. I then swam on my back in the direction of land, and beached him at the feet of an admiring crowd. I had thought of putting him under once or twice just to show him he was being rescued, but decided against such a course as needlessly realistic. As it was, I fancy he had swallowed two or three hearty

draughts of sea water.

The crowd was enthusiastic.

"Mr. Garnet," he said, "we parted recently in anger. I hope that bygones will be bygones." "Mr. Garnet," he said, "we parted recently in anger. I hope that bygones will be bygones."

"Brave young feller," said somebody.

I blushed. This was fame.

"Jumped in, he did, sure enough, an' saved the gentleman!"

"Be the old soul drownded?"

"That girt fule, 'Arry 'Awk!"

I was sorry for Mr. Hawk. Popular opinion, in which the professor wrathfully joined, was against him. I could not help thinking that my fellow-conspirator did well to keep out of it all. He was now sitting in the boat, which he had restored to its normal position, baling pensively with an old tin can. To satire from the shore he paid no attention.

The professor stood up and stretched out his hand to me.

I grasped it.

"Mr. Garnet," he said, for all the world as if he had been the father of the heroine of "Hilda's Hero," "we parted recently in anger. Let me thank you for your gallant conduct, and hope that bygones will be bygones."

Like Mr. Samuel Weller, I liked his conversation much. It was "werry pretty."

I came out strong. I continued to hold his hand. The crowd raised a sympathetic cheer.

I said:

"Professor, the fault was mine. Show that you have forgiven me by coming up to the

farm and putting on something dry."

"An excellent idea, me boy. I am a little wet."

We walked briskly up the hill to the farm. Ukridge met us at the gate.

He diagnosed the situation rapidly.

"You're all wet," he said.

I admitted it.

"Professor Derrick has had an unfortunate boating accident," I explained.

"And Mr. Garnet heroically dived in, in all his clothes, and saved me life," broke in the professor. "A hero, sir. A-choo!"

"You're catching cold, old horse," said Ukridge, all friendliness and concern, his little differences with the professor having vanished like thawed snow. "This'll never do. Come upstairs and get into something of Garnet's. My own toggery wouldn't fit, what? Come along, come along. I'll get you some hot water. Mrs. Beale—Mrs. Beale! We want a large can of hot water. At once. What? Yes, immediately. What? Very well, then, as soon as you can. Now, then, Garny, my boy, out with the duds. What do you think of this, now, professor? A sweetly pretty thing in gray flannel. Here's a shirt. Get out of that wet toggery, and Mrs. Beale shall dry it. Don't attempt to tell me about it till you've changed. Socks? Socks forward. Show socks. Here you are. Coat? Try this blazer. That's right. That's right."

He bustled about till the professor was clothed, then marched him downstairs and gave him a cigar.

"Now, what's all this? What happened?"

The professor explained. He was severe in his narration upon the unlucky Mr. Hawk.

"I was fishing, Mr. Ukridge, with me back turned, when I felt the boat rock violently from one side to the other to such an extent that I nearly lost me equilibrium. And

then the boat upset. The man's a fool, sir. I could not see what had happened, my back being turned, as I say."

"Garnet must have seen. What happened, Marmaduke?"

I tried to smooth things over for Mr. Hawk.

"It was very sudden," I said. "It seemed to me as if the man had got an attack of cramp. That would account for it. He has the reputation of being a most sober and trustworthy fellow."

"Never trust that sort of man," said Ukridge. "They are always the worst. It's plain to me that this man was beastly drunk, and upset the boat while trying to do a dance."

The professor was in the best of tempers, and I worked strenuously to keep him so. My scheme had been so successful that its iniquity did not worry me. I have noticed that this is usually the case in matters of this kind. It is the bungled crime that brings remorse.

"We must go round the links together one of these days, Mr. Garnet," said the professor. "I have noticed you there on several occasions, playing a strong game. I have lately taken to using a Schenectady putter. It is wonderful what a difference it makes."

Golf is a great bond of union. We wandered about the grounds discussing the game, the entente cordiale growing more firmly established every moment.

"We must certainly arrange a meeting," concluded the professor. "I shall be interested to see how we stand with regard to one another. I have improved my game considerably since I have been down here—considerably."

"My only feat worthy of mention since I started the game," I said, "has been to halve a round with Angus McLurkin at St. Andrew's."

"The McLurkin?" asked the professor, impressed.

"Yes. But it was one of his very off days, I fancy. He must have had gout, or

something. And I have certainly never played so well since."

"Still—" said the professor. "Yes, we must really arrange to meet."

With Ukridge, who was in one of his less tactless moods, he became very friendly.

Ukridge's ready agreement with his strictures on the erring Hawk had a great deal to do with this. When a man has a grievance he feels drawn to those who will hear him patiently and sympathize. Ukridge was all sympathy.

"The man is an unprincipled scoundrel," he said, "and should be torn limb from limb. Take my advice, Cholmondeley, and don't go out with him again. Show him that you are not a man to be trifled with. The spilled child dreads the water, what? Human life isn't safe with such men as Hawk roaming about."

"You are perfectly right, sir. The man can have no defense. I shall not employ him again."

I felt more than a little guilty while listening to this duet on the subject of the man whom I had lured from the straight and narrow path. But my attempts at excusing him were ill received. Indeed, the professor showed such distinct signs of becoming heated that I abandoned my fellow-conspirator to his fate with extreme promptness. After all, an addition to the stipulated reward—one of these days—would compensate him for any loss which he might sustain from the withdrawal of the professor's custom. Mr. Harry Hawk was in good enough case. I would see that he did not suffer.

Filled with these philanthropic feelings, I turned once more to talk with the professor of niblicks and approach shots and holes done in three without a brassy. We were a merry party at lunch—a lunch, fortunately, in Mrs. Beale's best vein, consisting of a roast chicken and sweets. Chicken had figured somewhat frequently of late on our daily bill of fare.

We saw the professor off the premises in his dried clothes, and I turned back to put the fowls to bed in a happier frame of mind than I had known for a long time. I

whistled rag-time airs as I worked.

"Rum old buffer," said Ukridge meditatively. "My goodness, I should have liked to see him in the water. Why do I miss these good things?"

SOME EMOTIONS

Chap_12

T

he fame which came to me through that gallant rescue was a little embarrassing. I was a marked man. Did I walk through the village, heads emerged from windows, and eyes followed me out of sight. Did I sit on the beach, groups formed behind me and watched in silent admiration. I was the man of the moment.

"If we'd wanted an advertisement for the farm," said Ukridge on one of these occasions, "we couldn't have had a better one than you, Garny, my boy. You have brought us three distinct orders for eggs during the last week. And I'll tell you what it is, we need all the orders we can get that'll bring us in ready money. The farm is in a critical condition, Marmaduke. The coffers are low, decidedly low. And I'll tell you another thing. I'm getting precious tired of living on nothing but chicken and eggs. So's Millie, though she doesn't say so."

"So am I," I said, "and I don't feel like imitating your wife's proud reserve. I never want to see a chicken again except alive."

For the last week monotony had been the keynote of our commissariat. We had cold chicken and eggs for breakfast, boiled chicken and eggs for lunch, and roast chicken and eggs for dinner. Meals became a nuisance, and Mrs. Beale complained bitterly that we did not give her a chance. She was a cook who would have graced an alderman's house, and served up noble dinners for gourmets, and here she was in this remote corner of the world ringing the changes on boiled chicken and roast chicken

and boiled eggs and poached eggs. Mr. Whistler, set to paint signboards for public houses, might have felt the same restless discontent. As for her husband, the hired retainer, he took life as tranquilly as ever, and seemed to regard the whole thing as the most exhilarating farce he had ever been in. I think he looked on Ukridge as an amiable lunatic, and was content to rough it a little in order to enjoy the privilege of observing his movements. He made no complaints of the food. When a man has supported life for a number of years on incessant army beef, the monotony of daily chicken and eggs scarcely strikes him.

"The fact is," said Ukridge, "these tradesmen round here seem to be a sordid, suspicious lot. They clamor for money."

He mentioned a few examples. Vickers, the butcher, had been the first to strike, with the remark that he would like to see the color of Mr. Ukridge's money before supplying further joints. Dawlish, the grocer, had expressed almost exactly similar sentiments two days later, and the ranks of these passive resisters had been receiving fresh recruits ever since. To a man the tradesmen of Lyme Regis seemed as deficient in simple faith as they were in Norman blood.

"Can't you pay some of them a little on account?" I suggested. "It would set them going again."

"My dear old man," said Ukridge impressively, "we need every penny of ready money we can raise for the farm. The place simply eats money. That infernal roop let us in for I don't know what."

That insidious epidemic had indeed proved costly. We had painted the throats of the chickens with the best turpentine—at least, Ukridge and Beale had—but in spite of their efforts dozens had died, and we had been obliged to sink much more money than was pleasant in restocking the run.

"No," said Ukridge, summing up, "these men must wait. We can't help their troubles. Why, good gracious, it isn't as if they'd been waiting for the money long. We've not

been down here much over a month. I never heard such a scandalous thing. 'Pon my word, I've a good mind to go round and have a straight talk with one or two of them. I come and settle down here, and stimulate trade, and give them large orders, and they worry me with bills when they know I'm up to my eyes in work, looking after the fowls. One can't attend to everything. This business is just now at its most crucial point. It would be fatal to pay any attention to anything else with things as they are. These scoundrels will get paid all in good time."

It is a peculiarity of situations of this kind that the ideas of debtor and creditor as to what constitutes good time never coincide.

I am afraid that, despite the urgent need for strict attention to business, I was inclined to neglect my duties about this time. I had got into the habit of wandering off, either to the links, where I generally found the professor and sometimes Phyllis, or on long walks by myself. There was one particular walk, along the Ware cliff, through some of the most beautiful scenery I have ever set eyes on, which more than any other suited my mood. I would work my way through the woods till I came to a small clearing on the very edge of the cliff. There I would sit by the hour. Somehow I found that my ideas flowed more readily in that spot than in any other. My novel was taking shape. It was to be called, by the way, if it ever won through to the goal of a title, "The Brown-haired Girl."

I had not been inside the professor's grounds since the occasion when I had gone in through the boxwood hedge. But on the afternoon following my financial conversation with Ukridge I made my way thither after a toilet which, from its length, should have produced better results than it did.

Not for four whole days had I caught so much as a glimpse of Phyllis. I had been to the links three times, and had met the professor twice, but on both occasions she had been absent. I had not had the courage to ask after her. I had an absurd idea that my voice or my manner would betray me in some way.

The professor was not at home. Nor was Mr. Chase. Nor was Miss Norah Derrick, the lady I had met on the beach with the professor. Miss Phyllis, said the maid, was in the garden.

I went into the garden. She was sitting under the cedar by the tennis lawn, reading. She looked up as I approached.

To walk any distance under observation is one of the most trying things I know. I advanced in bad order, hoping that my hands did not really look as big as they felt. The same remark applied to my feet. In emergencies of this kind a diffident man could very well dispense with extremities. I should have liked to be wheeled up in a bath chair.

I said it was a lovely afternoon; after which there was a lull in the conversation. I was filled with a horrid fear that I was boring her. I had probably arrived at the very moment when she was most interested in her book. She must, I thought, even now be regarding me as a nuisance, and was probably rehearsing bitter things to say to the servant for not having had the sense to explain that she was out.

"I—er—called in the hope of seeing Professor Derrick," I said.

"You would find him on the links," she replied. It seemed to me that she spoke wistfully.

"Oh, it—it doesn't matter," I said. "It wasn't anything important."

This was true. If the professor had appeared then and there, I should have found it difficult to think of anything to say to him which would have accounted for my anxiety to see him.

We paused again.

"How are the chickens, Mr. Garnet?" said she.

The situation was saved. Conversationally, I am like a clockwork toy. I have to be set going. On the affairs of the farm I could speak fluently. I sketched for her the

progress we had made since her visit. I was humorous concerning roop, epigrammatic on the subject of the hired retainer and Edwin.

"Then the cat did come down from the chimney?" said Phyllis.

We both laughed, and—I can answer for myself—felt the better for it.

"He came down next day," I said, "and made an excellent lunch off one of our best fowls. He also killed another, and only just escaped death himself at the hands of Ukridge."

"Mr. Ukridge doesn't like him, does he?"

"If he does, he dissembles his love. Edwin is Mrs. Ukridge's pet. He is the only subject on which they disagree. Edwin is certainly in the way on a chicken farm. He has got over his fear of Bob, and is now perfectly lawless. We have to keep a constant eye on him."

"And have you had any success with the incubator? I love incubators. I have always wanted to have one of my own, but we have never kept fowls."

"The incubator has not done all that it should have done," I said. "Ukridge looks after it, and I fancy his methods are not the right methods. I don't know if I have got the figures absolutely correct, but Ukridge reasons on these lines. He says you are supposed to keep the temperature up to a hundred and five degrees. I think he said a hundred and five. Then the eggs are supposed to hatch out in a week or so. He argues that you may just as well keep the temperature at seventy-two, and wait a fortnight for your chickens. I am certain there's a fallacy in the system somewhere, because we never seem to get as far as the chickens. But Ukridge says his theory is mathematically sound and he sticks to it."

"Are you quite sure that the way you are doing it is the best way to manage a chicken farm?"

"I should very much doubt it. I am a child in these matters. I had only seen a chicken

in its wild state once or twice before we came down here. I had never dreamed of being an active assistant on a real farm. The whole thing began like Mr. George Ade's fable of the author. An author—myself—was sitting at his desk trying to turn out something that could be converted into breakfast food, when a friend came in and sat down on the table and told him to go right on and not mind him."

"Did Mr. Ukridge do that?"

"Very nearly that. He called at my rooms one beautiful morning when I was feeling desperately tired of London and overworked and dying for a holiday, and suggested that I should come to Lyme Regis with him and help him farm chickens. I have not regretted it."

"It is a lovely place, isn't it?"

"The loveliest I have ever seen. How charming your garden is."

"Shall we go and look at it? You have not seen the whole of it."

As she rose I saw her book, which she had laid face downward on the grass beside her. It was that same much-enduring copy of "The Maneuvers of Arthur." I was thrilled. This patient perseverance must surely mean something.

She saw me looking at it.

"Did you draw Pamela from anybody?" she asked suddenly.

I was glad now that I had not done so. The wretched Pamela, once my pride, was for some reason unpopular with the only critic about whose opinion I cared, and had fallen accordingly from her pedestal.

As we wandered down the gravel paths she gave me her opinion of the book. In the main it was appreciative. I shall always associate the scent of yellow lubin with the higher criticism.

"Of course I don't know anything about writing books," she said.

"Yes?" My tone implied, or I hoped it did, that she was an expert on books, and that

if she was not it didn't matter.

"But I don't think you do your heroines well. I have got 'The Outsider'—"

(My other novel. Bastable & Kirby, six shillings. Satirical. All about society, of which I know less than I know about chicken farming. Slated by Times and Spectator. Well received by the Pelican.)

"—and," continued Phyllis, "Lady Maud is exactly the same as Pamela in 'The Maneuvers of Arthur.' I thought you must have drawn both characters from some one you knew."

"No," I said; "no."

"I am so glad," said Phyllis.

And then neither of us seemed to have anything to say.

My knees began to tremble. I realized that the moment had arrived when my fate must be put to the touch, and I feared that the moment was premature. We cannot arrange these things to suit ourselves. I knew that the time was not yet ripe, but the magic scent of the yellow lubin was too much for me.

"Miss Derrick—" I said hoarsely.

Phyllis was looking with more intentness than the attractions of the flower justified at a rose she held in her hand. The bees hummed in the lubin.

"Miss Derrick—" I said, and stopped again.

"I say, you people," said a cheerful voice, "tea is ready. Halloo, Garnet, how are you? That medal arrived yet from the humane society?"

I spun round. Mr. Tom Chase was standing at the end of the path. I grinned a sickly grin.

"Well, Tom," said Phyllis.

And there was, I thought, just the faintest trace of annoyance in her voice.

"I've been bathing," said Mr. Chase.

"Oh," I replied. "And I wish," I added, "that you'd drowned yourself."

But I added it silently to myself.

TEA AND TENNIS

Chap_13

M

et the professor's late boatman on the Cob," said Mr. Chase, dissecting a chocolate cake.

"Clumsy man," said Phyllis, "I hope he was ashamed of himself. I shall never forgive him for trying to drown papa."

My heart bled for Mr. Henry Hawk, that modern martyr.

"When I met him," said Tom Chase, "he looked as if he had been trying to drown his sorrow as well."

"I knew he drank," said Phyllis severely, "the very first time I saw him."

"You might have warned the professor," murmured Mr. Chase.

"He couldn't have upset the boat if he had been sober."

"You never know. He may have done it on purpose."

"How absurd!"

"Rather rough on the man, aren't you?" I said.

"Merely a suggestion," continued Mr. Chase airily. "I've been reading sensational novels lately, and it seems to me that Hawk's cut out to be a minion. Probably some secret foe of the professor's bribed him."

My heart stood still. Did he know, I wondered, and was this all a roundabout way of telling me that he knew?

"The professor may be a member of an anarchist league, or something, and this is his punishment for refusing to assassinate the Kaiser."

"Have another cup of tea, Tom, and stop talking nonsense."

Mr. Chase handed in his cup.

"What gave me the idea that the upset was done on purpose was this. I saw the whole thing from the Ware cliff. The spill looked to me just like dozens I had seen at Malta."

"Why do they upset themselves on purpose at Malta particularly?" inquired Phyllis.

"Listen carefully, my dear, and you'll know more about the ways of the navy that guards your coasts than you did before. When men are allowed on shore at Malta, the owner has a fancy to see them snugly on board again at a certain reasonable hour. After that hour any Maltese policeman who brings them aboard gets one sovereign, cash. But he has to do all the bringing part of it on his own. Consequence is, you see boats rowing out to the ship, carrying men who have overstayed their leave; and, when they get near enough, the able-bodied gentleman in custody jumps to his feet, upsets the boat, and swims to the gangway. The policemen, if they aren't drowned—they sometimes are—race him, and whichever gets there first wins. If it's the policeman, he gets his sovereign. If it's the sailor, he is considered to have arrived not in a state of custody, and gets off easier. What a judicious remark that was of the Governor of North Carolina to the Governor of South Carolina! Just one more cup, please, Phyllis."

"But how does all that apply?" I asked, dry-mouthed.

"Why, Hawk upset the professor just as those Maltese were upset. There's a patent way of doing it. Furthermore, by judicious questioning, I found that Hawk was once in the navy, and stationed at Malta. Now, who's going to drag in Sherlock Holmes?"

"You don't really think—" I said, feeling like a criminal in the dock when the case is going against him.

"I think friend Hawk has been reënacting the joys of his vanished youth, so to speak."

"He ought to be prosecuted," said Phyllis, blazing with indignation.

Alas, poor Hawk!

"Nobody's safe with a man of that sort hiring out a boat."

Oh, miserable Hawk!

"But why on earth," I asked, as calmly as possible, "should he play a trick like that on Professor Derrick, Chase?"

"Pure animal spirits, probably. Or he may, as I say, be a minion."

I was hot all over.

"I shall tell father that," said Phyllis in her most decided voice, "and see what he says. I don't wonder at the man taking to drink after doing such a thing."

"I—I think you're making a mistake," I said.

"I never make mistakes," Mr. Chase replied. "I am called Archibald the All Right, for I am infallible. I propose to keep a reflective eye upon the jovial Hawk."

He helped himself to another section of the chocolate cake.

"Haven't you finished yet, Tom?" inquired Phyllis. "I'm sure Mr. Garnet's getting tired of sitting talking here."

I shot out a polite negative. Mr. Chase explained with his mouth full that he had by no means finished. Chocolate cake, it appeared, was the dream of his life. When at sea he was accustomed to lie awake o' nights thinking of it.

"You don't seem to realize," he said, "that I have just come from a cruise on a torpedo boat. There was such a sea on, as a rule, that cooking operations were entirely suspended, and we lived on ham and sardines—without bread."

"How horrible!"

"On the other hand," added Mr. Chase philosophically, "it didn't matter much, because we were all ill most of the time."

"Don't be nasty, Tom."

"I was merely defending myself. I hope Mr. Hawk will be able to do as well when his turn comes. My aim, my dear Phyllis, is to show you in a series of impressionist pictures the sort of thing I have to go through when I'm not here. Then perhaps you won't rend me so savagely over a matter of five minutes' lateness for breakfast."

"Five minutes! It was three quarters of an hour, and everything was simply frozen."

"Quite right, too, in weather like this. You're a slave to convention, Phyllis. You think breakfast ought to be hot, so you always have it hot. On occasion I prefer mine cold. Mine is the truer wisdom. I have scoffed the better part, as the good Kipling has it. You can give the cook my compliments, Phyllis, and tell her—gently, for I don't wish the glad news to overwhelm her—that I enjoyed that cake. Say that I shall be glad to hear from her again. Care for a game of tennis, Garnet?"

"What a pity Norah isn't here," said Phyllis. "We could have had a four."

"But she is at present wasting her sweetness on the desert air of Yeovil. You had better sit out and watch us, Phyllis. Tennis in this sort of weather is no job for the delicately nurtured feminine. I will explain the finer points of my play as we go on. Look out particularly for the Doherty Back-handed Slosh. A winning stroke every time."

We proceeded to the tennis court. I played with the sun in my eyes. I might, if I chose, emphasize that fact, and attribute my subsequent rout to it, adding, by way of solidifying the excuse, that I was playing in a strange court with a borrowed racket, and that my mind was preoccupied—firstly, with l'affaire Hawk; secondly, and chiefly, with the gloomy thought that Phyllis and my opponent seemed to be on fiendishly good terms with each other. Their manner at tea had been almost that of an engaged couple. There was a thorough understanding between them. I will not,

however, take refuge behind excuses. I admit, without qualifying the statement, that Mr. Chase was too good for me. I had always been under the impression that lieutenants in the royal navy were not brilliant at tennis. I had met them at various houses, but they had never shone conspicuously. They had played an earnest, unobtrusive game, and generally seemed glad when it was over. Mr. Chase was not of this sort. His service was bottled lightning. His returns behaved like jumping crackers. He won the first game in precisely four strokes. He served. I know now how soldiers feel under fire. The balls whistled at me like live things. Only once did I take the service with the full face of the racket, and then I seemed to be stopping a bullet. I returned it into the net.

"Game," said Mr. Chase.

I felt a worm, and no man. Phyllis, I thought, would probably judge my entire character from this exhibition. A man, she would reflect, who could be so feeble and miserable a failure at tennis, could not be good for much in any department of life. She would compare me instructively with my opponent, and contrast his dash and brilliance with my own inefficiency. Somehow, the massacre was beginning to have a bad effect on my character. My self-respect was ebbing. A little more of this, and I should become crushed—a mere human jelly. It was my turn to serve. Service is my strong point at tennis. I am inaccurate but vigorous, and occasionally send in a quite unplayable shot. One or two of these, even at the expense of a fault or so, and I might be permitted to retain at least a portion of my self-respect.

I opened with two faults. The sight of Phyllis, sitting calm and cool in her chair under the cedar, unnerved me. I served another fault. And yet another.

"Here, I say, Garnet," observed Mr. Chase plaintively, "do put me out of this hideous suspense. I'm becoming a mere bundle of quivering ganglions."

I loath facetiousness in moments of stress. I frowned austerely, made no reply, and served another fault, my fifth.

Matters had reached a crisis. Even if I had to lob it under hand, I must send the ball over the net with this next stroke.

I restrained myself this time, eschewing the careless vigor which had marked my previous efforts. The ball flew in a slow semicircle, and pitched inside the correct court. At least, I told myself, I had not served a fault.

What happened then I cannot exactly say. I saw my opponent spring forward like a panther and whirl his racket. The next moment the back net was shaking violently and the ball was rolling swiftly along the ground on a return journey to the other court.

"Love—forty," said Mr. Chase. "Phyllis!"

"Yes?"

"That was the Doherty Slosh."

"I thought it must be," said Phyllis.

The game ended with another brace of faults.

In the third game I managed to score fifteen. By the merest chance I returned one of his red-hot serves, and—probably through surprise—he failed to send it back again.

In the fourth and fifth games I omitted to score.

We began the sixth game. And now for some reason I played really well. I struck a little vein of brilliance. I was serving, and this time a proportion of my serves went over the net instead of trying to get through. The score went from fifteen all to forty-fifteen. Hope began to surge through my veins. If I could keep this up, I might win yet.

The Doherty Slosh diminished my lead by fifteen. The Renshaw Slam brought the score to Deuce. Then I got in a really fine serve, which beat him. 'Vantage in. Another Slosh. Deuce. Another Slam. 'Vantage out. It was an awesome moment. There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood—I served. Fault. I

served again—a beauty. He returned it like a flash into the corner of the court. With a supreme effort I got to it. We rallied. I was playing like a professor. Then whizz!

The Doherty Slosh had beaten me on the post.

"Game and—" said Mr. Chase, twirling his racket into the air and catching it by the handle. "Good game that last one."

I turned to see what Phyllis thought of it. At the eleventh hour I had shown her of what stuff I was made.

She had disappeared.

"Looking for Miss Derrick?" said Chase, jumping the net, and joining me in my court; "she's gone into the house."

"When did she go?"

"At the end of the fifth game," said Chase.

"Gone to dress for dinner, I suppose," he continued. "It must be getting late. I think I ought to be going, too, if you don't mind. The professor gets a little restive if I keep him waiting for his daily bread. Great Scott, that watch can't be right! What do you make it? Yes, so do I. I really think I must run. You won't mind? Good night, then. See you to-morrow, I hope."

I walked slowly out across the fields. That same star, in which I had confided on a former occasion, was at its post. It looked placid and cheerful. It never got beaten by six games to love under the eyes of its particular lady star. It was never cut out ignominiously by infernally capable lieutenants in his Majesty's navy. No wonder it was cheerful.

It must be pleasant to be a star.

A COUNCIL OF WAR

Chap_14

T

he fact is," said Ukridge, "if things go on as they are now, old horse, we shall be in the cart. This business wants bucking up. We don't seem to be making headway. What we want is time. If only these scoundrels of tradesmen would leave us alone for a spell, we might get things going properly. But we're hampered and worried and rattled all the time. Aren't we, Millie?"

"Yes, dear."

"You don't let me see the financial side of the thing," I said, "except at intervals. I didn't know we were in such a bad way. The fowls look fit enough, and Edwin hasn't had one for a week."

"Edwin knows as well as possible when he's done wrong, Mr. Garnet," said Mrs. Ukridge. "He was so sorry after he had killed those other two."

"Yes," said Ukridge. "I saw to that."

"As far as I can see," I continued, "we're going strong. Chicken for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is a shade monotonous, but look at the business we're doing. We sold a whole heap of eggs last week."

"It's not enough, Garny, my boy. We sell a dozen eggs where we ought to be selling a hundred, carting them off in trucks for the London market. Harrod's and Whiteley's and the rest of them are beginning to get on their hind legs, and talk. That's what they're doing. You see, Marmaduke, there's no denying it—we did touch them for a lot of things on account, and they agreed to take it out in eggs. They seem to be getting tired of waiting."

"Their last letter was quite pathetic," said Mrs. Ukridge.

I had a vision of an eggless London. I seemed to see homes rendered desolate and lives embittered by the slump, and millionaires bidding against one another for the few specimens Ukridge had actually managed to dispatch to Brompton and

Bayswater.

"I told them in my last letter but three," continued Ukridge complainingly, "that I proposed to let them have the eggs on the Times installment system, and they said I was frivolous. They said that to send thirteen eggs as payment for goods supplied to the value of twenty-five pounds one shilling and sixpence was mere trifling. Trifling! when those thirteen eggs were absolutely all we had over that week after Mrs. Beale had taken what she wanted for the kitchen. I tell you what it is, old boy, that woman literally eats eggs."

"The habit is not confined to her," I said.

"What I mean to say is, she seems to bathe in them."

An impressive picture to one who knew Mrs. Beale.

"She says she needs so many for puddings, dear," said Mrs. Ukridge. "I spoke to her about it yesterday. And, of course, we often have omelets."

"She can't make omelets without breakings eggs," I urged.

"She can't make them without breaking us," said Ukridge. "One or two more omelets and we're done for. Another thing," he continued, "that incubator thing won't work. I don't know what's wrong with it."

"Perhaps it's your dodge of letting down the temperature."

I had touched upon a tender point.

"My dear fellow," he said earnestly, "there's nothing the matter with my figures. It's a mathematical certainty. What's the good of mathematics if not to help you work out that sort of thing? No, there's something wrong with the machine itself, and I shall probably make a complaint to the people I got it from. Where did we get the incubator, Millie?"

"Harrod's, I think, dear. Yes, it was Harrod's. It came down with the first lot of things from there."

"Then," said Ukridge, banging the table with his fist, while his glasses flashed triumph, "we've got 'em! Write and answer that letter of theirs to-night, Millie. Sit on them."

"Yes, dear."

"And tell 'em that we'd have sent 'em their confounded eggs weeks ago if only their rotten, twopenny-ha'penny incubator had worked with any approach to decency."

"Or words to that effect," I suggested.

"Add in a postscript that I consider that the manufacturer of the thing ought to rent a padded cell at Earlswood, and that they are scoundrels for palming off a groggy machine of that sort on me. I'll teach them!"

"Yes, dear."

"The ceremony of opening the morning's letters at Harrod's ought to be full of interest and excitement to-morrow," I said.

This dashing counter stroke served to relieve Ukridge's pessimistic mood. He seldom looked on the dark side of things for long at a time. He began now to speak hopefully of the future. He planned out ingenious, if somewhat impracticable, improvements in the farm. Our fowls were to multiply so rapidly and consistently that within a short space of time Dorsetshire would be paved with them. Our eggs were to increase in size till they broke records, and got three-line notices in the "Items of Interest" column of the Daily Mail. Briefly, each hen was to become a happy combination of rabbit and ostrich.

"There is certainly a good time coming," I said. "May it be soon. Meanwhile, there remain the local tradesmen. What of them?"

Ukridge relapsed once more into pessimism.

"They are the worst of the lot," he said. "I don't mind about the London men so much. They only write. And a letter or two hurts nobody. But when it comes to

butchers and bakers and grocers and fishmongers and fruiterers, and what not, coming up to one's house and dunning one in one's own garden—well, it's a little hard, what?"

It may be wondered why, before things came to such a crisis, I had not placed my balance at the bank at the disposal of the senior partner for use on behalf of the firm. The fact was that my balance was at the moment small. I have not yet in the course of this narrative gone into my pecuniary position, but I may state here that it was an inconvenient one. It was big with possibilities, but of ready cash there was but a meager supply. My parents had been poor, but I had a wealthy uncle. Uncles are notoriously careless of the comfort of their nephews. Mine was no exception. He had views. He was a great believer in matrimony, as, having married three wives—not, I should add, simultaneously—he had every right to be. He was also of opinion that the less money the young bachelor possessed, the better. The consequence was that he announced his intention of giving me a handsome allowance from the day that I married, but not an instant before. Till that glad day I would have to shift for myself. And I am bound to admit that—for an uncle—it was a remarkably sensible idea. I am also of opinion that it is greatly to my credit, and a proof of my pure and unmercenary nature, that I did not instantly put myself up to be raffled for, or rush out into the streets and propose marriage to the first lady I met. I was making enough with my pen to support myself, and, be it ever so humble, there is something pleasant in a bachelor existence, or so I had thought until very recently.

I had thus no great stake in Ukridge's chicken farm. I had contributed a modest five pounds to the preliminary expenses, and another five pounds after the roop incident. But further I could not go with safety. When his income is dependent on the whims of editors and publishers, the prudent man keeps something up his sleeve against a sudden slump in his particular wares. I did not wish to have to make a hurried choice between matrimony and the workhouse.

Having exhausted the subject of finance—or, rather, when I began to feel that it was exhausting me—I took my clubs and strolled up the hill to the links to play off a match with a sportsman from the village. I had entered some days previously a competition for a trophy (I quote the printed notice) presented by a local supporter of the game, in which up to the present I was getting on nicely. I had survived two rounds, and expected to beat my present opponent, which would bring me into the semi-final. Unless I had bad luck, I felt that I ought to get into the final, and win it. As far as I could gather from watching the play of my rivals, the professor was the best of them, and I was convinced that I should have no difficulty with him. But he had the most extraordinary luck at golf, though he never admitted it. He also exercised quite an uncanny influence on his opponent. I have seen men put completely off their stroke by his good fortune.

I disposed of my man without difficulty. We parted a little coldly. He decapitated his brassy on the occasion of his striking Dorsetshire instead of his ball, and he was slow in recovering from the complex emotions which such an episode induces.

In the clubhouse I met the professor, whose demeanor was a welcome contrast to that of my late antagonist. The professor had just routed his opponent, and so won through to the semi-final. He was warm but jubilant.

I congratulated him, and left the place.

Phyllis was waiting outside. She often went round the course with him.

"Good afternoon," I said. "Have you been round with the professor?"

"Yes. We must have been in front of you. Father won his match."

"So he was telling me. I was very glad to hear it."

"Did you win, Mr. Garnet?"

"Yes. Pretty easily. My opponent had bad luck all through. Bunkers seemed to have a magnetic attraction for him."

"So you and father are both in the semi-final? I hope you will play very badly."

"Thank you, Miss Derrick," I said.

"Yes, it does sound rude, doesn't it? But father has set his heart on winning this year. Do you know that he has played in the final round two years running now?"

"Really?"

"Both times he was beaten by the same man."

"Who was that? Mr. Derrick plays a much better game than anybody I have seen on these links."

"It was nobody who is here now. It was a Colonel Jervis. He has not come to Lyme Regis this year. That is why father is hopeful."

"Logically," I said, "he ought to be certain to win."

"Yes; but, you see, you were not playing last year, Mr. Garnet."

"Oh, the professor can make rings round me," I said.

"What did you go round in to-day?"

"We were playing match play, and only did the first dozen holes; but my average round is somewhere in the late eighties."

"The best father has ever done is ninety, and that was only once. So you see, Mr. Garnet, there's going to be another tragedy this year."

"You make me feel a perfect brute. But it's more than likely, you must remember, that I shall fail miserably if I ever do play your father in the final. There are days when I play golf very badly."

Phyllis smiled. "Do you really have your off days?"

"Nearly always. There are days when I slice with my driver as if it were a bread knife."

"Really?"

"And when I couldn't putt to hit a haystack."

"Then I hope it will be on one of those days that you play father."

"I hope so, too," I said.

"You hope so?"

"Yes."

"But don't you want to win?"

"I should prefer to please you."

Mr. Lewis Waller could not have said it better.

"Really, how very unselfish of you, Mr. Garnet," she replied with a laugh. "I had no idea that such chivalry existed. I thought a golfer would sacrifice anything to win a game."

"Most things."

"And trample on the feelings of anybody."

"Not everybody," I said.

At this point the professor joined us.

THE ARRIVAL OF NEMESIS

Chap_15

S

ome people do not believe in presentiments. They attribute that curious feeling that something unpleasant is going to happen to such mundane causes as liver or a chill or the weather. For my own part, I think there is more in the matter than the casual observer might imagine.

I awoke three days after my meeting with the professor at the clubhouse filled with a dull foreboding. Somehow I seemed to know that that day was going to turn out

badly for me. It may have been liver or a chill, but it was certainly not the weather. The morning was perfect, the most glorious of a glorious summer. There was a haze over the valley and out to sea which suggested a warm noon, when the sun should have begun the serious duties of the day. The birds were singing in the trees and breakfasting on the lawn, while Edwin, seated on one of the flower beds, watched them with the eye of a connoisseur. Occasionally, when a sparrow hopped in his direction, he would make a sudden spring, and the bird would fly away to the other side of the lawn. I had never seen Edwin catch a sparrow. I believe they looked on him as a bit of a crank, and humored him by coming within springing distance, just to keep him amused. Dashing young cock sparrows would show off before their particular hen sparrows, and earn a cheap reputation for dare-deviltry by going within so many yards of Edwin's lair and then darting away.

Bob was in his favorite place on the gravel. I took him with me down to the Cob to watch me bathe.

"What's the matter with me to-day, Robert, old man?" I asked him as I dried myself.

He blinked lazily, but contributed no suggestion.

"It's no good looking bored," I went on, "because I'm going to talk about myself, however much it bores you. Here am I, as fit as a prize fighter; living in the open air for I don't know how long; eating good, plain food; bathing every morning—sea bathing, mind you; and yet what's the result? I feel beastly."

Bob yawned and gave a little whine.

"Yes," I said, "I know I'm in love. But that can't be it, because I was in love just as much a week ago, and I felt all right then. But isn't she an angel, Bob? Eh? Isn't she? But how about Tom Chase? Don't you think he's a dangerous man? He calls her by her Christian name, you know, and behaves generally as if she belonged to him. And then he sees her every day, while I have to trust to meeting her at odd times, and then I generally feel like such a fool I can't think of anything to talk about except

golf and the weather. He probably sings duets with her after dinner. And you know what comes of duets after dinner."

Here Bob, who had been trying for some time to find a decent excuse for getting away, pretended to see something of importance at the other end of the Cob, and trotted off to investigate it, leaving me to finish dressing by myself.

"Of course," I said to myself, "it may be merely hunger. I may be all right after breakfast, but at present I seem to be working up for a really fine fit of the blues."

I whistled for Bob and started for home. On the beach I saw the professor some little distance away and waved my towel in a friendly manner. He made no reply.

Of course it was possible that he had not seen me, but for some reason his attitude struck me as ominous. As far as I could see, he was looking straight at me, and he was not a shortsighted man. I could think of no reason why he should cut me. We had met on the links on the previous morning, and he had been friendliness itself. He had called me "me dear boy," supplied me with ginger beer at the clubhouse, and generally behaved as if he had been David and I Jonathan. Yet in certain moods we are inclined to make mountains out of mole-hills, and I went on my way, puzzled and uneasy, with a distinct impression that I had received the cut direct.

I felt hurt. What had I done that Providence should make things so unpleasant for me? It would be a little hard, as Ukridge would have said, if, after all my trouble, the professor had discovered some fresh crow to pluck with me. Perhaps Ukridge had been irritating him again. I wished he would not identify me so completely with Ukridge. I could not be expected to control the man. Then I reflected that they could hardly have met in the few hours between my parting from the professor at the clubhouse and my meeting with him on the beach. Ukridge rarely left the farm. When he was not working among the fowls, he was lying on his back in the paddock, resting his massive mind.

I came to the conclusion that, after all, the professor had not seen me.

"I'm an idiot, Bob," I said, as we turned in at the farm gate, "and I let my imagination run away with me."

Bob wagged his tail in approval of the sentiment.

Breakfast was ready when I got in. There was a cold chicken on the sideboard, deviled chicken on the table, and a trio of boiled eggs, and a dish of scrambled eggs. I helped myself to the latter and sat down.

Ukridge was sorting the letters.

"Morning, Garny," he said. "One for you, Millie."

"It's from Aunt Elizabeth," said Mrs. Ukridge, looking at the envelope.

"Wish she'd inclose a check. She could spare it."

"I think she would, dear, if she knew how much it was needed. But I don't like to ask her. She's so curious and says such horrid things."

"She does," said Ukridge gloomily. He probably spoke from experience. "Two for you, Sebastian. All the rest for me. Eighteen of them, and all bills."

He spread them out on the table like a pack of cards, and drew one at a venture.

"Whiteley's," he said. "Getting jumpy. Are in receipt of my favor of the 7th inst, and are at a loss to understand—all sorts of things. Would like something on account."

"Grasping of them," I said.

"They seem to think I'm doing it for fun. How can I let them have their money when there isn't any?"

"Sounds difficult."

"Here's one from Dorchester—Smith, the man I got the gramophone from. Wants to know when I'm going to settle up for sixteen records."

"Sordid man!"

I wanted to get on with my own correspondence, but Ukridge was one of those men

who compel one's attention when they are talking.

"The chicken men, the dealer people, you know, want me to pay up for the first lot of hens. Considering that they all died of roop, and that I was going to send them back, anyhow, after I'd got them to hatch out a few chickens, I call that cool. I can't afford to pay heavy sums for birds which die off quicker than I can get them in. It isn't business."

It was not my business, at any rate, so I switched off my attention from Ukridge's troubles and was opening the first of my two letters when an exclamation from Mrs. Ukridge made me look up.

She had dropped the letter she had been reading and was staring indignantly in front of her. There were two little red spots on her cheeks.

"I shall never speak to Aunt Elizabeth again," she said.

"What's the matter, old chap?" inquired Ukridge affectionately, glancing up from his pile of bills. "Aunt Elizabeth been getting on your nerves again? What's she been saying this time?"

Mrs. Ukridge left the room with a sob.

Ukridge sprang at the letter.

"If that demon doesn't stop writing letters and upsetting Millie I shall lynch her," he said. I had never seen him so genuinely angry. He turned over the pages till he came to the passage which had caused the trouble. "Listen to this, Garnet. 'I'm sorry, but not surprised, to hear that the chicken farm is not proving a great success. I think you know my opinion of your husband. He is perfectly helpless in any matter requiring the exercise of a little common sense and business capability.' I like that! 'Pon my soul, I like that! You've known me longer than she has, Garny, and you know that it's just in matters requiring common sense that I come out strong. What?"

"Of course, old man," I replied dutifully. "The woman must be a fool."

"That's what she calls me two lines farther on. No wonder Millie was upset. Why can't these cats leave people alone?"

"O woman, woman!" I threw in helpfully.

"Always interfering—"

"Beastly!"

"—and backbiting—"

"Awful!"

"I shan't stand it!"

"I shouldn't."

"Look here! On the next page she calls me a gaby!"

"It's time you took a strong hand."

"And in the very next sentence refers to me as a perfect guffin. What's a guffin, Garny, old boy?"

"It sounds indecent."

"I believe it's actionable."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Ukridge rushed to the door.

"Millie!" he shouted.

No answer.

He slammed the door, and I heard him dashing upstairs.

I turned with a sense of relief to my letters. One was from Lickford. It bore a Cornish postmark. I glanced through it, and laid it aside for a more exhaustive perusal later on.

The other was in a strange handwriting. I looked at the signature. Patrick Derrick. This was queer. What had the professor to say to me?

The next moment my heart seemed to spring to my throat.

"Sir," the letter began.

A pleasant, cheery beginning!

Then it got off the mark, so to speak, like lightning. There was no sparring for an opening, no dignified parade of set phrases leading up to the main point. It was the letter of a man who was almost too furious to write. It gave me the impression that, if he had not written it, he would have been obliged to have taken some very violent form of exercise by way of relief to his soul.

"You will be good enough," he wrote, "to look on our acquaintance as closed. I have no wish to associate with persons of your stamp. If we should happen to meet, you will be good enough to treat me as a total stranger, as I shall treat you. And, if I may be allowed to give you a word of advice, I should recommend you in future, when you wish to exercise your humor, to do so in some less practical manner than by bribing boatmen to upset your" (friends crossed out thickly, and acquaintances substituted). "If you require further enlightenment in this matter, the inclosed letter may be of service to you."

With which he remained mine faithfully, Patrick Derrick.

The inclosed letter was from one Jane Muspratt. It was bright and interesting.

Dear Sir: My Harry, Mr. Hawk, sas to me how it was him upseting the boat and you, not because he is not steddy in a boat which he is no man more so in Lyme Regis but because one of the gentmen what keeps chikkens up the hill, the little one, Mr. Garnick his name is, says to him Hawk, I'll give you a sovrin to upset Mr. Derrick in your boat, and my Harry being esily led was took in and did but he's sory now and wishes he hadn't, and he sas he'll niver do a prackticle joke again for anyone even for a bank note.

Yours obedly

Jane Muspratt.

O woman, woman!

At the bottom of everything! History is full of cruel tragedies caused by the lethal sex.

Who lost Mark Antony the world? A woman. Who let Samson in so atrociously? Woman again. Why did Bill Bailey leave home? Once more, because of a woman. And here was I, Jerry Garnet, harmless, well-meaning writer of minor novels, going through the same old mill.

I cursed Jane Muspratt. What chance had I with Phyllis now? Could I hope to win over the professor again? I cursed Jane Muspratt for the second time.

My thoughts wandered to Mr. Harry Hawk. The villain! The scoundrel! What business had he to betray me? Well, I could settle with him. The man who lays a hand upon a woman, save in the way of kindness, is justly disliked by society; so the woman Muspratt, culpable as she was, was safe from me. But what of the man Hawk? There no such considerations swayed me. I would interview the man Hawk. I would give him the most hectic ten minutes of his career. I would say things to him the recollection of which would make him start up shrieking in his bed in the small hours of the night. I would arise, and be a man and slay him—take him grossly, full of bread, with all his crimes, broad-blown, as flush as May; at gaming, swearing, or about some act that had no relish of salvation in it.

The demon!

My life—ruined. My future—gray and blank. My heart—shattered. And why? Because of the scoundrel—Hawk.

Phyllis would meet me in the village, on the Cob, on the links, and pass by as if I were the invisible man. And why? Because of the reptile—Hawk. The worm—Hawk. The varlet—Hawk.

I crammed my hat on and hurried out of the house toward the village.

A CHANCE MEETING

Chap_16

I

roamed the place in search of the varlet for the space of half an hour, and, after having drawn all his familiar haunts, found him at length leaning over the sea wall near the church, gazing thoughtfully into the waters below.

I confronted him.

"Well," I said, "you're a beauty, aren't you?"

He eyed me owlishly. Even at this early hour, I was grieved to see, he showed signs of having looked on the bitter while it was brown.

"Beauty?" he echoed.

"What have you got to say for yourself?"

It was plain that he was engaged in pulling his faculties together by some laborious process known only to himself. At present my words conveyed no meaning to him. He was trying to identify me. He had seen me before somewhere, he was certain, but he could not say where, or who I was.

"I want to know," I said, "what induced you to be such an abject idiot as to let our arrangement get known?"

I spoke quietly. I was not going to waste the choicer flowers of speech on a man who was incapable of understanding them. Later on, when he had awakened to a sense of his position, I would begin really to talk to him.

He continued to stare at me. Then a sudden flash of intelligence lit up his features.

"Mr. Garnick," he said.

"You've got it at last."

He stretched out a huge hand.

"I want to know," I said distinctly, "what you've got to say for yourself after letting our affair with the professor become public property?"

He paused a while in thought.

"Dear sir," he said at last, as if he were dictating a letter, "dear sir, I owe you—ex—exp—"

"You do," said I grimly. "I should like to hear it."

"Dear sir, listen me."

"Go on, then."

"You came me. You said, 'Hawk, Hawk, ol' fren', listen me. You tip this ol' bufflehead into sea,' you said, 'an' gormed if I don't give 'ee a gould savrin.' That's what you said me. Isn't that what you said me?"

I did not deny it.

"Ve' well. I said you, 'Right,' I said. I tipped the ol' soul into sea, and I got the gould savrin."

"Yes, you took care of that. All this is quite true, but it's beside the point. We are not disputing about what happened. What I want to know for the third time—is what made you let the cat out of the bag? Why couldn't you keep quiet about it?"

He waved his hand.

"Dear sir," he replied. "This way. Listen me."

It was a tragic story that he unfolded. My wrath ebbed as I listened. After all, the fellow was not so greatly to blame. I felt that in his place I should have acted as he had done. Fate was culpable, and fate alone.

It appeared that he had not come well out of the matter of the accident. I had not

looked at it hitherto from his point of view. While the rescue had left me the popular hero, it had had quite the opposite result for him. He had upset his boat and would have drowned his passenger, said public opinion, if the young hero from London—myself—had not plunged in, and at the risk of his life brought the professor to shore. Consequently, he was despised by all as an inefficient boatman. He became a laughing stock. The local wags made laborious jests when he passed. They offered him fabulous sums to take their worst enemies out for a row with him. They wanted to know when he was going to school to learn his business. In fact, they behaved as wags do and always have done at all times all the world over.

Now, all this Mr. Hawk, it seemed, would have borne cheerfully and patiently for my sake, or, at any rate, for the sake of the good golden sovereign I had given him. But a fresh factor appeared in the problem, complicating it grievously. To wit, Miss Jane Muspratt.

"She said me," explained Mr. Hawk with pathos, "'Harry 'Awk,' she said, 'yeou'm a girt fule, an' I don't marry noone as is ain't to be trusted in a boat by hisself, and what has jokes made about him by that Tom Leigh.' I punched Tom Leigh," observed Mr. Hawk parenthetically. "'So,' she said me, 'yeou can go away, an' I don't want to see yeou again.'"

This heartless conduct on the part of Miss Muspratt had had the natural result of making him confess all in self-defense, and she had written to the professor the same night.

I forgave Mr. Hawk. I think he was hardly sober enough to understand, for he betrayed no emotion.

"It is fate, Hawk," I said, "simply fate. There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will, and it's no good grumbling."

"Yiss," said Mr. Hawk, after chewing this sentiment for a while in silence, "so she said me, 'Hawk,' she said—like that—'you're a girt fule—'"

"That's all right," I replied. "I quite understand. As I say, it's simply fate. Good-by."

And I left him.

As I was going back, I met the professor and Phyllis.

They passed me without a look.

I wandered on in quite a fervor of self-pity. I was in one of those moods when life suddenly seems to become irksome, when the future stretches blank and gray in front of one. In such a mood it is imperative that one should seek distraction. The shining example of Mr. Harry Hawk did not lure me. Taking to drink would be a nuisance. Work was what I wanted. I would toil like a navvy all day among the fowls, separating them when they fought, gathering in the eggs when they laid, chasing them across country when they got away, and even, if necessity arose, painting their throats with turpentine when they were stricken with roop. Then, after dinner, when the lamps were lit, and Mrs. Ukridge petted Edwin and sewed, and Ukridge smoked cigars and incited the gramophone to murder "Mumbling Mose," I would steal away to my bedroom and write—and write—and write—and go on writing till my fingers were numb and my eyes refused to do their duty. And, when time had passed, I might come to feel that it was all for the best. A man must go through the fire before he can write his masterpiece. We learn in suffering what we teach in song. What we lose on the swings we make up on the roundabouts. Jerry Garnet, the man, might become a depressed, hopeless wreck, with the iron planted irremovably in his soul; but Jeremy Garnet, the author, should turn out such a novel of gloom that strong critics would weep and the public jostle for copies till Mudie's doorways became a shambles.

Thus might I some day feel that all this anguish was really a blessing—effectively disguised.

But I doubted it.

We were none of us very cheerful now at the farm. Even Ukridge's spirit was a little

daunted by the bills which poured in by every post. It was as if the tradesmen of the neighborhood had formed a league and were working in concert. Or it may have been due to thought waves. Little accounts came not in single spies but in battalions. The popular demand for a sight of the color of his money grew daily. Every morning at breakfast he would give us fresh bulletins of the state of mind of each of our creditors, and thrill us with the announcement that Whiteley's were getting cross and Harrod's jumpy, or that the bearings of Dawlish, the grocer, were becoming over-heated. We lived in a continual atmosphere of worry. Chicken and nothing but chicken at meals, and chicken and nothing but chicken between meals, had frayed our nerves. An air of defeat hung over the place. We were a beaten side, and we realized it. We had been playing an uphill game for nearly two months, and the strain was beginning to tell. Ukridge became uncannily silent. Mrs. Ukridge, though she did not understand, I fancy, the details of the matter, was worried because Ukridge was. Mrs. Beale had long since been turned into a soured cynic by the lack of chances vouchsafed her for the exercise of her art. And as for me, I have never since spent so profoundly miserable a week. I was not even permitted the anodyne of work. There seemed to be nothing to do on the farm. The chickens were quite happy, and only asked to be let alone and allowed to have their meals at regular intervals. And every day one or more of their number would vanish into the kitchen, and Mrs. Beale would serve up the corpse in some cunning disguise, and we would try to delude ourselves into the idea that it was something altogether different.

There was one solitary gleam of variety in our menu. An editor sent me a check for a guinea for a set of verses. We cashed that check and trooped round the town in a body, laying out the money. We bought a leg of mutton and a tongue and sardines and pineapple chunks and potted meat and many other noble things, and had a perfect banquet.

After that we relapsed into routine again.

Deprived of physical labor, with the exception of golf and bathing—trivial sports compared with work in the fowl runs at its hardest—I tried to make up for it by working at my novel.

It refused to materialize.

I felt, like the man in the fable, as if some one had played a mean trick on me, and substituted for my brain a side order of cauliflower. By no manner of means could I get the plot to shape itself. I could not detach my mind from my own painful case. Instead of thinking of my characters, I sat in my chair and thought miserably of Phyllis.

The only progress I achieved was with my villain.

I drew him from the professor and made him a blackmailer. He had several other social defects, but that was his profession. That was the thing he did really well.

It was on one of the many occasions on which I had sat in my room, pen in hand, through the whole of a lovely afternoon, with no better result than a slight headache, that I bethought me of that little paradise on the Ware Cliff, hung over the sea and backed by green woods. I had not been there for sometime, owing principally to an entirely erroneous idea that I could do more solid work sitting in a straight, hard chair at a table than lying on soft turf with the sea wind in my eyes.

But now the desire to visit that little clearing again drove me from my room. In the drawing-room below, the gramophone was dealing brassily with "Mister Blackman." Outside, the sun was just thinking of setting. The Ware Cliff was the best medicine for me. What does Kipling say?

And soon you will find that the sun and the wind And the Djinn of the Garden, too, Have lightened the Hump, Cameelious Hump, The Hump that is black and blue.

His instructions include digging with a hoe and a shovel also, but I could omit that. The sun and wind were what I needed.

I took the upper road. In certain moods I preferred it to the path along the cliff. I walked fast. The exercise was soothing.

To reach my favorite clearing I had to take to the fields on the left and strike down hill in the direction of the sea. I hurried down the narrow path.

I broke into the clearing at a jog trot, and stood panting. And at the same moment, looking cool and beautiful in her white dress, Phyllis entered it from the other side. Phyllis—without the professor.

OF A SENTIMENTAL NATURE

Chap_17

S

he was wearing a Panama, and she carried a sketching block and camp stool.

"Good evening," I said.

"Good evening," said she.

It is curious how different the same words can sound when spoken by different people. My "good evening" might have been that of a man with a particularly guilty conscience caught in the act of doing something more than usually ignoble. She spoke like a somewhat offended angel.

"It's a lovely evening," I went on pluckily.

"Very."

"The sunset!"

"Yes."

"Er—"

She raised a pair of blue eyes, devoid of all expression save a faint suggestion of surprise, gazed through me for a moment at some object a couple of thousand miles

away, and lowered them again, leaving me with a vague feeling that there was something wrong with my personal appearance.

Very calmly she moved to the edge of the cliff, arranged her camp stool, and sat down. Neither of us spoke a word. I watched her while she filled a little mug with water from a little bottle, opened her paint box, selected a brush, and placed her sketching block in position.

She began to paint.

Now, by all the laws of good taste, I should before this have made a dignified exit. When a lady shows a gentleman that his presence is unwelcome, it is up to him, as an American friend of mine pithily observed to me on one occasion, to get busy and chase himself, and see if he can make the tall timber in two jumps. In other words, to retire. It was plain that I was not regarded as an essential ornament of this portion of the Ware Cliff. By now, if I had been the perfect gentleman, I ought to have been a quarter of a mile away.

But there is a definite limit to what a man can do. I remained.

The sinking sun flung a carpet of gold across the sea. Phyllis's hair was tinged with it. Little waves tumbled lazily on the beach below. Except for the song of a distant blackbird running through its repertory before retiring for the night, everything was silent.

Especially Phyllis.

She sat there, dipping and painting and dipping again, with never a word for me—standing patiently and humbly behind her.

"Miss Derrick," I said.

She half turned her head.

"Yes?"

One of the most valuable things which a lifetime devoted to sport teaches a man is

"never play the goose game." Bold attack is the safest rule in nine cases out of ten, wherever you are and whatever you may be doing. If you are batting, attack the ball. If you are boxing, get after your man. If you are talking, go to the point.

"Why won't you speak to me?" I said.

"I don't understand you."

"Why won't you speak to me?"

"I think you know, Mr. Garnet."

"It is because of that boat accident?"

"Accident!"

"Episode," I amended.

She went on painting in silence. From where I stood I could see her profile. Her chin was tilted. Her expression was determined.

"Is it?" I said.

"Need we discuss it?"

"Not if you do not wish."

I paused.

"But," I added, "I should have liked a chance to defend myself.... What glorious sunsets there have been these last few days. I believe we shall have this sort of weather for another month."

"I should not have thought that possible."

"The glass is going up," I said.

"I was not talking about the weather."

"It was dull of me to introduce such a worn-out topic."

"You said you could defend yourself."

"I said I should like the chance to do so."

"Then you shall have it."

"That is very kind of you. Thank you."

"Is there any reason for gratitude?"

"Every reason."

"Go on, Mr. Garnet. I can listen while I paint. But please sit down. I don't like being talked to from a height."

I sat down on the grass in front of her, feeling as I did so that the change of position in a manner clipped my wings. It is difficult to speak movingly while sitting on the ground. Instinctively, I avoided eloquence. Standing up, I might have been pathetic and pleading. Sitting down, I was compelled to be matter of fact.

"You remember, of course, the night you and Professor Derrick dined with us? When I say dined, I use the word in a loose sense."

For a moment I thought she was going to smile. We were both thinking of Edwin. But it was only for a moment, and then her face grew cold once more, and the chin resumed its angle of determination.

"Yes," she said.

"You remember the unfortunate ending of the festivities?"

"Well?"

"I naturally wished to mend matters. It occurred to me that an excellent way would be by doing your father a service. It was seeing him fishing that put the idea of a boat accident into my head. I hoped for a genuine boat accident. But those things only happen when one does not want them. So I determined to engineer one."

"You didn't think of the shock to my father."

"I did. It worried me very much."

"But you upset him all the same."

"Reluctantly."

She looked up and our eyes met. I could detect no trace of forgiveness in hers.

"You behaved abominably," she said.

"I played a risky game, and I lost. And I shall now take the consequences. With luck I should have won. I did not have luck, and I am not going to grumble about it. But I am grateful to you for letting me explain. I should not have liked you to go on thinking that I played practical jokes on my friends. That is all I have to say, I think. It was kind of you to listen. Good-by, Miss Derrick."

I got up.

"Are you going?"

"Why not?"

"Please sit down again."

"But you wish to be alone—"

"Please sit down!"

There was a flush on the fair cheek turned toward me, and the chin was tilted higher.

I sat down.

To westward the sky had changed to the hue of a bruised cherry. The sun had sunk below the horizon, and the sea looked cold and leaden. The blackbird had long since gone to bed.

"I am glad you told me, Mr. Garnet."

She dipped her brush in the water.

"Because I don't like to think badly of—people."

She bent her head over her painting.

"Though I still think you behaved very wrongly. And I am afraid my father will never forgive you for what you did."

Her father! As if he counted!

"But you do?" I said eagerly.

"I think you are less to blame than I thought you were at first."

"No more than that?"

"You can't expect to escape all consequences. You did a very stupid thing."

"Consider the temptation."

The sky was a dull gray now. It was growing dusk. The grass on which I sat was wet with dew.

I stood up.

"Isn't it getting a little dark for painting?" I said. "Are you sure you won't catch cold? It's very damp."

"Perhaps it is. And it is late, too."

She shut her paint box and emptied the little mug on the grass.

"You will let me carry your things?" I said.

I think she hesitated, but only for a moment. I possessed myself of the camp stool, and we started on our homeward journey. We were both silent. The spell of the quiet summer evening was on us.

"'And all the air a solemn stillness holds,'" she said softly. "I love this cliff, Mr. Garnet. It's the most soothing place in the world."

"I have found it so this evening."

She glanced at me quickly.

"You're not looking well," she said. "Are you sure you are not overworking yourself?"

"No, it's not that."

Somehow we had stopped, as if by agreement, and were facing each other. There

was a look in her eyes I had never seen there before. The twilight hung like a curtain between us and the world. We were alone together in a world of our own.

"It is because I had displeased you," I said.

She laughed nervously.

"I have loved you ever since I first saw you," I said doggedly.

UKRIDGE GIVES ME ADVICE

Chap_18

H

ours after—or so it seemed to me—we reached the spot at which our ways divided. We stopped, and I felt as if I had been suddenly cast back into the workaday world from some distant and pleasanter planet. I think Phyllis must have had something of the same sensation, for we both became on the instant intensely practical and businesslike.

"But about your father," I said briskly. I was not even holding her hand.

"That's the difficulty."

"He won't give his consent?"

"I'm afraid he wouldn't dream of it."

"You can't persuade him?"

"I can in most things, but not in this. You see, even if nothing had happened, he wouldn't like to lose me just yet, because of Norah."

"Norah!"

"My sister. She's going to be married in October. I wonder if we shall ever be as happy as they will?"

I laughed scornfully.

"Happy! They will be miserable compared with us. Not that I know who the man is."

"Why, Tom, of course. Do you mean to say you really didn't know?"

"Tom! Tom Chase?"

"Of course."

I gasped.

"Well, I'm—hanged," I said. "When I think of the torments I've been through because of that wretched man, and all for nothing, I don't know what to say."

"Don't you like Tom?"

"Very much. I always did. But I was awfully jealous of him."

"You weren't! How silly of you."

"Of course I was. He was always about with you, and called you Phyllis, and generally behaved as if you and he were the heroine and hero of a musical comedy, so what else could I think? I heard you singing duets after dinner once. I drew the worst conclusions."

"When was that?"

"It was shortly after Ukridge had got on your father's nerves, and nipped our acquaintance in the bud. I used to come every night to the hedge opposite your drawing-room window, and brood there by the hour."

"Poor old boy!"

"Hoping to hear you sing. And when you did sing, and he joined in all flat, I used to scold. You'll probably find most of the bark worn off the tree I leaned against."

"Poor old man! Still, it's all over now, isn't it?"

"And when I was doing my very best to show off before you at tennis, you went away just as I got into form."

"I'm very sorry, but I couldn't know—could I? I thought you always played like

that."

"I know. I knew you would. It nearly turned my hair white. I didn't see how a girl could ever care for a man who was so bad at tennis."

"One doesn't love a man because he's good at tennis."

"What does a girl see to love in a man?" I inquired abruptly; and paused on the verge of a great discovery.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied, most unsatisfactorily.

And I could draw no views from her.

"But about father," said she. "What are we to do?"

"He objects to me."

"He's perfectly furious with you."

"Blow, blow," I said, "thou winter wind. Thou art not so unkind—"

"He'll never forgive you."

"As man's ingratitude. I saved his life—at the risk of my own. Why, I believe I've got a legal claim on him. Whoever heard of a man having his life saved, and not being delighted when his preserver wanted to marry his daughter? Your father is striking at the very root of the short-story writer's little earnings. He mustn't be allowed to do it."

"Jerry!"

I started.

"Again!" I said.

"What?"

"Say it again. Do, please. Now."

"Very well. Jerry!"

"It was the first time you had called me by my Christian name. I don't suppose

you've the remotest notion how splendid it sounds when you say it. There is something poetical, something almost holy, about it."

"Jerry, please!"

"Say on."

"Do be sensible. Don't you see how serious this is? We must think how we can make father consent."

"All right," I said. "We'll tackle the point. I'm sorry to be frivolous, but I'm so happy I can't keep it all in. I've got you, and I can't think of anything else."

"Try."

"I'll pull myself together.... Now, say on once more."

"We can't marry without father's consent."

"Why not?" I said, not having a marked respect for the professor's whims. "Gretna Green is out of date, but there are registrars."

"I hate the very idea of a registrar," she said with decision. "Besides—"

"Well?"

"Poor father would never get over it. We've always been such friends. If I married against his wishes, he would—oh, you know—not let me come near him again, and not write to me. And he would hate it all the time he was doing it. He would be bored to death without me."

"Anybody would," I said.

"Because, you see, Norah has never been quite the same. She has spent such a lot of her time on visits to people that she and father don't understand each other so well as he and I do. She would try and be nice to him, but she wouldn't know him as I do. And, besides, she will be with him such a little, now she's going to be married."

"But, look here," I said, "this is absurd. You say your father would never see you again, and so on, if you married me. Why? It's nonsense. It isn't as if I were a sort of

social outcast. We were the best of friends till that man Hawk gave me away like that."

"I know. But he's very obstinate about some things. You see, he thinks the whole thing has made him look ridiculous, and it will take him a long time to forgive you for that."

I realized the truth of this. One can pardon any injury to oneself, unless it hurts one's vanity. Moreover, even in a genuine case of rescue, the rescued man must always feel a little aggrieved with his rescuer when he thinks the matter over in cold blood. He must regard him unconsciously as the super regards the actor manager, indebted to him for the means of supporting existence, but grudging him the lime light and the center of the stage and the applause. Besides, everyone instinctively dislikes being under an obligation which he can never wholly repay. And when a man discovers that he has experienced all these mixed sensations for nothing, as the professor had done, his wrath is likely to be no slight thing.

Taking everything into consideration, I could not but feel that it would require more than a little persuasion to make the professor bestow his blessing with that genial warmth which we like to see in our fathers-in-law elect.

"You don't think," I said, "that time, the great healer, and so on—he won't feel kindlier disposed toward me—say in a month's time?"

"Of course, he might," said Phyllis; but she spoke doubtfully.

"He strikes me, from what I have seen of him, as a man of moods. I might do something one of these days which would completely alter his views. We will hope for the best."

"About telling father—"

"Need we tell him?" I asked.

"Yes, we must. I couldn't bear to think that I was keeping it from him. I don't think

I've ever kept anything from him in my life. Nothing bad, I mean."

"You count this among your darker crimes, then?"

"I was looking at it from father's point of view. He will be awfully angry. I don't know how I shall begin telling him."

"Good heavens!" I cried, "you surely don't think I'm going to let you do that! Keep safely out of the way while you tell him? Not much. I'm coming back with you now, and we'll break the bad news together."

"No, not to-night. He may be tired and rather cross. We had better wait till to-morrow. You might speak to him in the morning."

"Where shall I find him?"

"He is certain to go to the beach before breakfast to bathe."

"Good. To-morrow, do thy worst, for I have lived to-day. I'll be there."

"Ukridge," I said, when I got back, "can you give me audience for a brief space? I want your advice."

This stirred him like a trumpet blast. When a man is in the habit of giving unsolicited counsel to everyone he meets, it is as invigorating as an electric shock to him to be asked for it spontaneously.

"What's up, old horse?" he asked eagerly. "I'll tell you what to do. Get on to it. Bang it out. Here, let's go into the garden."

I approved of this. I can always talk more readily in the dark, and I did not wish to be interrupted by the sudden entrance of the hired retainer or Mrs. Beale. We walked down to the paddock. Ukridge lit a cigar.

"I'm in love, Ukridge," I said.

"What!"

"More—I'm engaged."

A huge hand whistled through the darkness and smote me heavily between the shoulder blades.

"Thanks," I said; "that felt congratulatory."

"By Jove! old boy, I wish you luck. 'Pon my word, I do. Fancy you engaged! Best thing in the world for you. Never knew what happiness was till I married. A man wants a helpmeet—"

"And this man," I said, "seems likely to go on wanting. That's where I need your advice. I'm engaged to Miss Derrick."

"Miss Derrick!" He spoke as if he hardly knew whom I meant.

"You can't have forgotten her! Good heavens, what eyes some men have! Why, if I'd only seen her once, I should have remembered her all my life."

"I know now. She came to dinner here with her father, that fat little buffer."

"As you were careful to call him at the time. Thereby starting all the trouble."

"You fished him out of the water afterwards."

"Quite right."

"Why, it's a perfect romance, old horse. It's like the stories you read."

"And write. But they all end happily. 'There is none, my brave young preserver, to whom I would more willingly intrust my daughter's happiness.' Unfortunately, in my little drama, the heavy father seems likely to forget his cue."

"The old man won't give his consent?"

"Probably not."

"But why? What's the matter with you? If you marry, you'll come into your uncle's money, and all that."

"True. Affluence stares me in the face."

"And you fished him out of the water."

"After previously chucking him in."

"What!"

"At any rate, by proxy."

I explained. Ukridge, I regret to say, laughed.

"You vagabond!" he said. "'Pon my word, old horse, to look at you, one would never have thought you'd have had it in you."

"I can't help looking respectable."

"What are you going to do about it? The old man's got it up against you good and strong, there's no doubt of that."

"That's where I wanted your advice. You're a man of resource. What would you do if you were in my place?"

Ukridge tapped me impressively on the shoulder.

"Marmaduke," he said, "there's one thing that'll carry you through any mess."

"And that is—"

"Cheek, my boy—cheek! Gall! Why, take my case. I never told you how I came to marry, did I? I thought not. Well, it was this way. You've heard us mention Millie's Aunt Elizabeth—what? Well, then, when I tell you that she was Millie's nearest relative, and it was her consent I had to gather, you'll see that it wasn't a walk-over."

"Well?" I said.

"First time I saw Millie was in a first-class carriage on the underground. I'd got a third-class ticket, by the way. We weren't alone. It was five a side. But she sat opposite me, and I fell in love with her there and then. We both got out at South Kensington. I followed her. She went to a house in Thurloe Square. I waited outside and thought it over. I had got to get into that house and make her acquaintance. So I rang the bell. 'Is Lady Lichenhall at home?' I asked. You note the artfulness? My asking for Lady Lichenhall made 'em think I was one of the upper ten—what?"

"How were you dressed?" I could not help asking.

"Oh, it was one of my frock-coat days. I'd been to see a man about tutoring his son. There was nothing the matter with my appearance. 'No,' said the servant, 'nobody of that name lives here. This is Lady Lakenheath's house.' So, you see, I had luck at the start, because the two names were a bit alike. Well, I got the servant to show me in somehow, and, once in, you can wager I talked for all I was worth. Kept up a flow of conversation about being misdirected and coming to the wrong house, and so on. Went away, and called a few days later. Called regularly. Met 'em at every theater they went to, and bowed, and finally got away with Millie before her aunt could tell what was happening, or who I was or what I was doing or anything."

"And what's the moral?" I said.

"Why, go in hard. Rush 'em. Bustle 'em. Don't give 'em a moment's rest."

"Don't play the goose game," I said with that curious thrill we feel when somebody's independent view of a matter coincides with one's own.

"That's it. Don't play the goose game. Don't give 'em time to think. Why, if I'd given Millie's aunt time to think, where should we have been? Not at Lyme Regis together, I'll bet."

"Ukridge," I said, "you inspire me. You would inspire a caterpillar. I will go to the professor—I was going anyhow—but now I shall go aggressively, and bustle him. I will surprise a father's blessing out of him, if I have to do it with a crowbar!"

I ASK PAPA

Chap_19

R

eviewing the matter later, I see that I made a poor choice of time and place. But at the moment this did not strike me. It is a simple thing, I reflected, for a man to pass

another by haughtily and without recognition, when they meet on dry land; but when the said man, being an indifferent swimmer, is accosted in the water and out of his depth, the feat becomes a hard one.

When, therefore, having undressed on the Cob on the following morning, I spied in the distance, as I was about to dive, the gray head of the professor bobbing on the face of the waters, I did not hesitate. I plunged in and swam rapidly toward him.

His face was turned in the opposite direction when I came up with him, and it was soon evident that he had not observed my approach. For when, treading water easily in his immediate rear, I wished him good morning in my most conciliatory tones, he stood not upon the order of his sinking, but went under like so much pig iron. I waited courteously until he rose to the surface once more, when I repeated my remark.

He expelled the last remnant of water from his mouth with a wrathful splutter, and cleared his eyes with the back of his hand.

"The water is delightfully warm," I said.

"Oh, it's you!" said he, and I could not cheat myself into believing that he spoke cordially.

"You are swimming splendidly this morning," I said, feeling that an ounce of flattery is often worth a pound of rhetoric. "If," I added, "you will allow me to say so."

"I will not," he snapped. "I—" Here a small wave, noticing that his mouth was open, walked in. "I wish," he resumed warmly, "as I said in me letter, to have nothing to do with you. I consider ye've behaved in a manner that can only be described as abominable, and I will thank ye to leave me alone."

"But, allow me—"

"I will not allow ye, sir. I will allow ye nothing. Is it not enough to make me the laughingstock, the butt, sir, of this town, without pursuing me in this manner when I

wish to enjoy a quiet swim?"

His remarks, which I have placed on paper as if they were continuous and uninterrupted, were punctuated in reality by a series of gasps and puffings as he received and ejected the successors of the wave he had swallowed at the beginning of our little chat. The art of conducting bright conversation while in the water is not given to every swimmer. This he seemed to realize, for, as if to close the interview, he proceeded to make his way as quickly as he could toward the shore. Using my best stroke, I shot beyond him and turned, treading water as before.

"But, professor," I said, "one moment."

I was growing annoyed with the man. I could have ducked him but for the reflection that my prospects of obtaining his consent to my engagement with Phyllis would hardly have been enhanced thereby. No more convincing proof of my devotion can be given than this, that I did not seize that little man by the top of his head, thrust him under water, and keep him there.

I restrained myself. I was suave. Soothing, even.

"But, professor," I said, "one moment."

"Not one," he spluttered. "Go away, sir. I will have nothing to say to you."

"I shan't keep you a minute."

He had been trying all this while to pass me and escape to the shore, but I kept always directly in front of him. He now gave up the attempt and came to standstill.

"Well?" he said.

Without preamble I gave out the text of the address I was about to deliver to him.

"I love your daughter Phyllis, Mr. Derrick. She loves me. In fact, we are engaged," I said.

He went under as if he had been seized with cramp. It was a little trying having to argue with a man, of whom one could not predict with certainty that at any given

moment he would not be under water. It tended to spoil one's flow of eloquence. The best of arguments is useless if the listener suddenly disappears in the middle of it.

However, I persevered.

"Mr. Derrick," I said, as his head emerged, "you are naturally surprised."

"You—you—you—"

So far from cooling him, liberal doses of water seemed to make him more heated.

"You impudent scoundrel!"

He said that—not I. What I said was more gentlemanly, more courteous, on a higher plane altogether.

I said winningly: "Mr. Derrick, cannot we let bygones be bygones?"

From his expression I gathered that we could not.

I continued. I was under the unfortunate necessity of having to condense my remarks. I was not able to let myself go as I could have wished, for time was an important consideration. Erelong, swallowing water at his present rate, the professor must inevitably become waterlogged. It behooved me to be succinct.

"I have loved your daughter," I said rapidly, "ever since I first saw her. I learned last night that she loved me. But she will not marry me without your consent. Stretch your arms out straight from the shoulders and fill your lungs well, and you can't sink. So I have come this morning to ask for your consent. I know we have not been on the best of terms lately."

"You—"

"For Heaven's sake, don't try to talk. Your one chance of remaining on the surface is to keep your lungs well filled. The fault," I said generously, "was mine. But when you have heard my explanation, I am sure you will forgive me. There, I told you so."

He reappeared some few feet to the left. I swam up and resumed:

"When you left us so abruptly after our little dinner party, you put me in a very

awkward position. I was desperately in love with your daughter, and as long as you were in the frame of mind in which you left, I could not hope to find an opportunity of telling her so. You see what a fix I was in, don't you? I thought for hours and hours, to try and find some means of bringing about a reconciliation. You wouldn't believe how hard I thought. At last, seeing you fishing one morning when I was on the Cob, it struck me all of a sudden that the very best way would be to arrange a little boating accident. I was confident that I could rescue you all right."

"You young blackguard!"

He managed to slip past me, and made for the shore again.

"Strike out—but hear me," I said, swimming by his side. "Look at the thing from the standpoint of a philosopher. The fact that the rescue was arranged oughtn't really to influence you in the least. You didn't know it at the time, therefore relatively it was not, and you were genuinely saved from a watery grave."

I felt that I was becoming a shade too metaphysical, but I could not help it. What I wanted to point out was that I had certainly pulled him out of the water, and that the fact that I had caused him to be pushed in had nothing to do with the case. Either a man is a gallant rescuer or he is not a gallant rescuer. There is no middle course. I had saved his life, for he would have drowned if he had been left to himself, and was consequently entitled to his gratitude. And that was all that there was to be said about it.

These things I endeavored to make plain to him as we swam along. But whether it was that the salt water he had swallowed dulled his intelligence or that my power of stating a case neatly was to seek, the fact remains that he reached the beach an unconvinced man.

We faced one another, dripping.

"Then may I consider," I said, "that your objections are removed? We have your consent?"

He stamped angrily, and his bare foot came down on a small but singularly sharp pebble. With a brief exclamation he seized the foot with one hand and hopped. While hopping, he delivered his ultimatum. Probably this is the only instance on record of a father adopting this attitude in dismissing a suitor.

"You may not," he said. "You may not consider any such thing. My objections were never more—absolute. You detain me in the water till I am blue, sir, blue with cold, in order to listen to the most preposterous and impudent nonsense I ever heard."

This was unjust. If he had heard me attentively from the first and avoided interruptions and not behaved like a submarine, we should have got through our little business in half the time. We might both have been dry and clothed by now.

I endeavored to point this out to him.

"Don't talk to me, sir," he roared, hobbling off across the beach to his dressing tent. "I will not listen to you. I will have nothing to do with you. I consider you impudent, sir."

"I am sure it was unintentional, Mr. Derrick."

"Isch!" he said—being the first occasion and the last on which I ever heard that remarkable word proceed from the mouth of man.

And he vanished into his tent, while I, wading in once more, swam back to the Cob and put on my clothes.

And so home, as Pepys would have said, to breakfast, feeling depressed.

SCIENTIFIC GOLF

Chap_20

A

s I stood with Ukridge in the fowl run on the morning following my maritime conversation with the professor, regarding a hen that had posed before us, obviously

with a view to inspection, there appeared a man carrying an envelope.

Ukridge, who by this time saw, as Calverley almost said, "under every hat a dun," and imagined that no envelope could contain anything but a small account, softly and silently vanished away, leaving me to interview the enemy.

"Mr. Garnet, sir?" said the foe.

I recognized him. He was Professor Derrick's gardener. What did this portend? Had the merits of my pleadings come home to the professor when he thought them over, and was there a father's blessing inclosed in the envelope which was being held out to me?

I opened the envelope. No, father's blessings were absent. The letter was in the third person. Professor Derrick begged to inform Mr. Garnet that, by defeating Mr. Saul Potter, he had qualified for the final round of the Lyme Regis Golf Tournament, in which, he understood, Mr. Garnet was to be his opponent. If it would be convenient for Mr. Garnet to play off the match on the present afternoon, Professor Derrick would be obliged if he would be at the clubhouse at half-past two. If this hour and day were unsuitable, would he kindly arrange others. The bearer would wait.

The bearer did wait, and then trudged off with a note, beautifully written in the third person, in which Mr. Garnet, after numerous compliments and thanks, begged to inform Professor Derrick that he would be at the clubhouse at the hour mentioned.

"And," I added—to myself, not in the note—"I will give him such a licking that he'll brain himself with a cleek."

For I was not pleased with the professor. I was conscious of a malicious joy at the prospect of snatching the prize from him. I knew he had set his heart on winning the tournament this year. To be runner-up two years in succession stimulates the desire for the first place. It would be doubly bitter to him to be beaten by a newcomer, after the absence of his rival, the colonel, had awakened hope in him. And I knew I could do it. Even allowing for bad luck—and I am never a very unlucky golfer—I could

rely almost with certainty on crushing the man.

"And I'll do it," I said to Bob, who had trotted up.

I often make Bob the recipient of my confidences. He listens appreciatively and never interrupts. And he never has grievances of his own. If there is one person I dislike, it is the man who tries to air his grievances when I wish to air mine.

"Bob," I said, running his tail through my fingers, "listen to me. If I am in form this afternoon, and I feel in my bones that I shall be, I shall nurse the professor. I shall play with him. Do you understand the principles of match play at golf, Robert? You score by holes, not strokes. There are eighteen holes. I shall toy with the professor, Bob. I shall let him get ahead, and then catch him up. I shall go ahead myself, and let him catch me up. I shall race him neck and neck till the very end. Then, when his hair has turned white with the strain, and he's lost a couple of stone in weight, and his eyes are starting out of his head, I shall go ahead and beat him by a hole. I'll teach him, Robert. He shall taste of my despair, and learn by proof in some wild hour how much the wretched dare. And when it's all over, and he's torn all his hair out and smashed all his clubs, I shall go and commit suicide off the Cob. Because, you see, if I can't marry Phyllis, I shan't have any use for life."

Bob wagged his tail cheerfully.

"I mean it," I said, rolling him on his back and punching him on the chest till his breathing became stertorous. "You don't see the sense of it, I know. But then you've got none of the finer feelings. You're a jolly good dog, Robert, but you're a rank materialist. Bones and cheese and potatoes with gravy over them make you happy. You don't know what it is to be in love. You'd better get right side up now, or you'll have apoplexy."

It has been my aim in the course of this narrative to extenuate nothing, nor set down aught in malice. Like the gentleman who played euchre with the heathen Chinee, I state but the facts. I do not, therefore, slur over my scheme for disturbing the

professor's peace of mind. I am not always good and noble. I am the hero of this story, but I have my off moments.

I felt ruthless toward the professor. I cannot plead ignorance of the golfer's point of view as an excuse for my plottings. I knew that to one whose soul is in the game, as the professor's was, the agony of being just beaten in an important match exceeds in bitterness all other agonies. I knew that if I scraped through by the smallest possible margin, his appetite would be destroyed, his sleep o' nights broken. He would wake from fitful slumber moaning that if he had only used his iron at the tenth hole all would have been well; that if he had aimed more carefully on the seventh green, life would not be drear and blank; that a more judicious manipulation of his brassy throughout might have given him something to live for. All these things I knew.

And they did not touch me. I was adamant.

The professor was waiting for me at the clubhouse, and greeted me with a cold and stately inclination of the head.

"Beautiful day for golf," I observed in my gay, chatty manner.

He bowed in silence.

"Very well," I thought. "Wait—just wait."

"Miss Derrick is well, I hope?" I added aloud.

That drew him. He started. His aspect became doubly forbidding.

"Miss Derrick is perfectly well, sir, I thank you."

"And you? No bad effect, I hope, from your dip yesterday?"

"Mr. Garnet, I came here for golf, not conversation," he said.

We made it so. I drove off from the first tee. It was a splendid drive. I should not say so if there were anyone else to say so for me. Modesty would forbid. But, as there is no one, I must repeat the statement. It was one of the best drives of my experience. The ball flashed through the air, took the bunker with a dozen feet to spare, and

rolled onto the green. I had felt all along that I should be in form. Unless my opponent was equally above himself, he was a lost man.

The excellence of my drive had not been without its effect on the professor. I could see that he was not confident. He addressed his ball more strangely and at greater length than anyone I had ever seen. He waggled his club over it as if he were going to perform a conjuring trick. Then he struck and topped it.

The ball rolled two yards.

He looked at it in silence. Then he looked at me—also in silence.

I was gazing seaward.

When I looked round, he was getting to work with a brassy.

This time he hit the bunker and rolled back. He repeated this maneuver twice.

"Hard luck!" I murmured sympathetically on the third occasion, thereby going as near to being slain with an iron as it has ever been my lot to go. Your true golfer is easily roused in times of misfortune, and there was a red gleam in the eye the professor turned to me.

"I shall pick my ball up," he growled.

We walked on in silence to the second tee.

He did the second hole in four, which was good. I won it in three, which—unfortunately for him—was better.

I won the third hole.

I won the fourth hole.

I won the fifth hole.

I glanced at my opponent out of the corner of my eyes. The man was suffering. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

His play had become wilder and wilder at each hole in arithmetical progression. If

he had been a plow, he could hardly have turned up more soil. The imagination recoiled from the thought of what he would be doing in another half hour if he deteriorated at his present speed.

A feeling of calm and content stole over me. I was not sorry for him. All the viciousness of my nature was uppermost in me. Once, when he missed the ball clean at the fifth tee, his eye met mine, and we stood staring at each other for a full half minute without moving. I believe if I had smiled then, he would have attacked me without hesitation. There is a type of golfer who really almost ceases to be human under stress of the wild agony of a series of foozles.

The sixth hole involves the player in a somewhat tricky piece of cross-country work. There is a nasty ditch to be negotiated. Many an optimist has been reduced to blank pessimism by that ditch. "All hope abandon, ye who enter here," might be written on a notice board over it.

The professor "entered there." The unhappy man sent his ball into its very jaws. And then madness seized him. The merciful laws of golf, framed by kindly men who do not wish to see the asylums of Great Britain overcrowded, enact that in such a case the player may take his ball and throw it over his shoulder. The same to count as one stroke. But vaulting ambition is apt to try and drive out from the ditch, thinking thereby to win through without losing a stroke. This way madness lies.

It was a grisly sight to see the professor, head and shoulders above the ditch, hewing at his obstinate Haskell.

"Sixteen!" said the professor at last between his teeth. Then, having made one or two further comments, he stooped and picked up his ball.

"I give you this hole," he said.

We walked on.

I won the seventh hole.

I won the eighth hole.

The ninth we halved, for in the black depth of my soul I had formed a plan of fiendish subtlety. I intended to allow him to win—with extreme labor—eight holes in succession.

Then, when hope was once more strong in him, I would win the last, and he would go mad.

I watched him carefully as we trudged on. Emotions chased one another across his face. When he won the tenth hole he merely refrained from oaths. When he won the eleventh a sort of sullen pleasure showed in his face. It was at the thirteenth that I detected the first dawning of hope. From then onward it grew. When, with a sequence of shocking shots, he took the seventeenth hole in eight, he was in a parlous condition. His run of success had engendered within him a desire for conversation. He wanted, as it were, to flap his wings and crow. I could see dignity wrestling with talkativeness.

I gave him a lead.

"You have got back your form now," I said.

Talkativeness had it. Dignity retired hurt. Speech came from him with a rush. When he brought off an excellent drive from the eighteenth tee, he seemed to forget everything.

"Me dear boy—" he began, and stopped abruptly in some confusion. Silence once more brooded over us as we played ourselves up the fairway and on to the green.

He was on the green in four. I reached it in three. His sixth stroke took him out.

I putted carefully to the very mouth of the hole.

I walked up to my ball and paused. I looked at the professor. He looked at me.

"Go on," he said hoarsely.

Suddenly a wave of compassion flooded over me. What right had I to torture the

man like this? He had not behaved well to me, but in the main it was my fault. In his place I should have acted in precisely the same way. In a flash I made up my mind.

"Professor," I said.

"Go on," he repeated.

"That looks a simple shot," I said, eyeing him steadily, "but I might easily miss it."

He started.

"And then you would win the championship."

He dabbed at his forehead with a wet ball of a handkerchief.

"It would be very pleasant for you after getting so near it the last two years."

"Go on," he said for the third time. But there was a note of hesitation in his voice.

"Sudden joy," I said, "would almost certainly make me miss it."

We looked at each other. He had the golf fever in his eyes.

"If," I said slowly, lifting my putter, "you were to give your consent to my marriage with Phyllis—"

He looked from me to the ball, from the ball to me, and back again to the ball. It was very, very near the hole.

"I love her," I said, "and I have discovered she loves me.... I shall be a rich man from the day I marry—"

His eyes were still fixed on the ball.

"Why not?" I said.

He looked up, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"You young divil," said he, smiting his thigh, "you young divil, you've beaten me."

I swung my putter, and drove the ball far beyond the green.

"On the contrary," I said, "you have beaten me."

I left the professor at the clubhouse and raced back to the farm. I wanted to pour my

joys into a sympathetic ear. Ukridge, I knew, would offer that same sympathetic ear. A good fellow, Ukridge. Always interested in what you had to tell him—never bored.

"Ukridge," I shouted.

No answer.

I flung open the dining-room door. Nobody.

I went into the drawing-room. It was empty.

I searched through the garden, and looked into his bedroom. He was not in either.

"He must have gone for a stroll," I said.

I rang the bell.

The hired retainer appeared, calm and imperturbable as ever.

"Sir?"

"Oh, where is Mr. Ukridge, Beale?"

"Mr. Ukridge, sir," said the hired retainer nonchalantly, "has gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ukridge and Mrs. Ukridge went away together by the three o'clock train."

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Chap_21

B

eale," I said, "what do you mean? Where have they gone?"

"Don't know, sir. London, I expect."

"When did they go? Oh, you told me that. Didn't they say why they were going?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't you ask? When you saw them packing up and going to the station, didn't you do anything?"

"No, sir."

"Why on earth not?"

"I didn't see them, sir. I only found out as they'd gone after they'd been and went, sir. Walking down by the 'Net and Mackerel,' met one of them coastguards. 'Oh,' says he, 'so you're moving?' 'Who's a-moving?' I says to him. 'Well,' he says to me, 'I seen your Mr. Ukridge and his missus get into the three o'clock train for Axminster. I thought as you was all a-moving.' 'Ho!' I says, 'Ho!' wondering, and I goes on. When I gets back, I asks the missus did she see them packing their boxes, and she says, 'No,' she says, they didn't pack no boxes as she knowed of. And blowed if they had, Mr. Garnet, sir."

"What, they didn't pack!"

"No, sir."

We looked at one another.

"Beale," I said.

"Sir?"

"Do you know what I think?"

"Yes, sir."

"They've bolted."

"So I says to the missus, sir. It struck me right off, in a manner of speaking."

"This is awful," I said.

"Yes, sir."

His face betrayed no emotion, but he was one of those men whose expression never

varies. It's a way they have in the army.

"This wants thinking out, Beale," I said.

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better ask Mrs. Beale to give me some dinner, and then I'll think it out."

"Yes, sir."

I was in an unpleasant position. Ukridge, by his defection, had left me in charge of the farm. I could dissolve the concern, I supposed, if I wished, and return to London; but I particularly desired to remain in Lyme Regis. To complete the victory I had won on the links, it was necessary for me to continue as I had begun. I was in the position of a general who has conquered a hostile country, and is obliged to soothe the feelings of the conquered people before his labors can be considered at an end. I had rushed the professor. It must now be my aim to keep him from regretting that he had been rushed. I must, therefore, stick to my post with the tenacity of a boy on a burning deck. There would be trouble. Of that I was certain. As soon as the news got about that Ukridge had gone, the deluge would begin. His creditors would abandon their passive tactics and take active steps. The siege of Port Arthur would be nothing to it. There was a chance that aggressive measures would be confined to the enemy at our gates, the tradesmen of Lyme Regis. But the probability was that the news would spread and the injured merchants of Dorchester and Axminster rush to the scene of hostilities. I foresaw unpleasantness.

I summoned Beale after dinner and held a council of war. It was no time for airy persiflage.

I said, "Beale, we're in the cart."

"Sir?"

"Mr. Ukridge going away like this has left me in a most unpleasant position. I would like to talk it over with you. I dare say you know that we—that Mr. Ukridge owes a

considerable amount of money roundabout here to tradesmen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, when they find out that he has—er—"

"Shot the moon, sir," suggested the hired retainer helpfully.

"Gone up to town," I said. "When they find that he has gone up to town, they are likely to come bothering us a good deal."

"Yes, sir."

"I fancy that we shall have them all round here by the day after to-morrow at the latest. Probably earlier. News of this sort always spreads quickly. The point is, then, what are we to do?"

He propounded no scheme, but stood in an easy attitude of attention, waiting for me to continue.

I continued.

"Let's see exactly how we stand," I said. "My point is that I particularly wish to go on living down here for at least another fortnight. Of course, my position is simple. I am Mr. Ukridge's guest. I shall go on living as I have been doing up to the present. He asked me down here to help him look after the fowls, so I shall go on looking after them. I shall want a chicken a day, I suppose, or perhaps two, for my meals, and there the thing ends, as far I am concerned. Complications set in when we come to consider you and Mrs. Beale. I suppose you won't care to stop on after this?"

The hired retainer scratched his chin and glanced out of the window. The moon was up and the garden looked cool and mysterious in the dim light.

"It's a pretty place, Mr. Garnet, sir," he said.

"It is," I said, "but about other considerations? There's the matter of wages. Are yours in arrears?"

"Yes, sir. A month."

"And Mrs. Beale's the same, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. A month."

"H'm. Well, it seems to me, Beale, you can't lose anything by stopping on."

"I can't be paid any less than I have been, sir," he agreed.

"Exactly. And, as you say, it's a pretty place. You might just as well stop on and help me in the fowl run. What do you think?"

"Very well, sir."

"And Mrs. Beale will do the same?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's excellent. You're a hero, Beale. I sha'n't forget you. There's a check coming to me from a magazine in another week for a short story. When it arrives I'll look into that matter of back wages. Tell Mrs. Beale I'm much obliged to her, will you?"

"Yes, sir."

Having concluded that delicate business, I strolled out into the garden with Bob. It was abominable of Ukridge to desert me in this way. Even if I had not been his friend, it would have been bad. The fact that we had known each other for years made it doubly discreditable. He might at least have warned me and given me the option of leaving the sinking ship with him.

But, I reflected, I ought not to be surprised. His whole career, as long as I had known him, had been dotted with little eccentricities of a type which an unfeeling world generally stigmatizes as shady. They were small things, it was true; but they ought to have warned me. We are most of us wise after the event. When the wind has blown we generally discover a multitude of straws which should have shown us which way it was blowing.

Once, I remembered, in our school-master days, when guineas, though regular, were few, he had had occasion to increase his wardrobe. If I recollect rightly, he thought

he had a chance of a good position in the tutoring line, and only needed good clothes to make it his. He took four pounds of his salary in advance—he was in the habit of doing this; he never had any of his salary left by the end of term, it having vanished in advance loans beforehand. With this he was to buy two suits, a hat, new boots, and collars. When it came to making the purchases, he found, what he had overlooked previously in his optimistic way, that four pounds did not go very far. At the time, I remember, I thought his method of grappling with the situation humorous. He bought a hat for three and sixpence, and got the suits and the boots on the installment system, paying a small sum in advance, as earnest of more to come. He then pawned one suit to pay the first few installments, and finally departed, to be known no more. His address he had given, with a false name, at an empty house, and when the tailor arrived with the minions of the law, all he found was an annoyed caretaker and a pile of letters written by himself, containing his bill in its various stages of evolution.

Or again. There was a bicycle and photograph shop near the school. He blew into this one day and his roving eye fell on a tandem bicycle. He did not want a tandem bicycle, but that influenced him not at all. He ordered it, provisionally. He also ordered an enlarging camera, a Kodak, and a magic lantern. The order was booked and the goods were to be delivered when he had made up his mind concerning them. After a week the shopman sent round to ask if there were any further particulars which Mr. Ukridge would like to learn before definitely ordering them. Mr. Ukridge sent word back that he was considering the matter, and that in the meantime would he be so good as to let him have that little clockwork man in his window, which walked when wound up? Having got this, and not paid for it, Ukridge thought that he had done handsomely by the bicycle and photograph man, and that things were square between them. The latter met him a few days afterwards and expostulated plaintively. Ukridge explained. "My good man," he said, "you know, I really think we need say no more about the matter. Really, you've come out of it very well. Now,

look here, which would you rather be owed for? A clockwork man, which is broken, and you can have it back, or a tandem bicycle, an enlarging camera, a Kodak, and a magic lantern? What?" His reasoning was too subtle for the uneducated mind. The man retired, puzzled and unpaid, and Ukridge kept the clockwork toy.

A remarkable financier, Ukridge. I sometimes think that he would have done well in the city.

I did not go to bed till late that night. There was something so peaceful in the silence that brooded over everything that I stayed on, enjoying it. Perhaps it struck me as all the more peaceful because I could not help thinking of the troublous times that were to come. Already I seemed to hear the horrid roar of a herd of infuriated creditors. I seemed to see fierce brawlings and sackings in progress in this very garden.

"It will be a coarse, brutal spectacle, Robert," I said.

Bob uttered a little whine, as if he, too, were endowed with powers of prophecy.

THE STORM BREAKS

Chap_22

R

ather to my surprise, the next morning passed off uneventfully. By lunch time I had come to the conclusion that the expected trouble would not occur that day, and I felt that I might well leave my post for the afternoon while I went to the professor's to pay my respects.

The professor was out when I arrived. Phyllis was in, and as we had a good many things of no importance to say to each other, it was not till the evening that I started for the farm again.

As I approached the sound of voices smote my ears.

I stopped. I could hear Beale speaking. Then came the rich notes of Vickers, the

butcher. Then Beale again. Then Dawlish, the grocer. Then a chorus.

The storm had burst, and in my absence.

I blushed for myself. I was in command, and I had deserted the fort in time of need. What must the faithful hired man be thinking of me? Probably he placed me, as he had placed Ukridge, in the ragged ranks of those who have shot the moon.

Fortunately, having just come from the professor's, I was in the costume which of all my wardrobe was most calculated to impress. To a casual observer I should probably suggest wealth and respectability. I stopped for a moment to cool myself, for, as is my habit when pleased with life, I had been walking fast, then I opened the gate and strode in, trying to look as opulent as possible.

It was an animated scene that met my eyes. In the middle of the lawn stood the devoted Beale, a little more flushed than I had seen him hitherto, parleying with a burly and excited young man without a coat. Grouped round the pair were some dozen men, young, middle-aged, and old, all talking their hardest. I could distinguish nothing of what they were saying. I noticed that Beale's left cheek bone was a little discolored, and there was a hard, dogged expression on his face. He, too, was in his shirt sleeves.

My entry created no sensation. Nobody, apparently, had heard the latch click, and nobody had caught sight of me. Their eyes were fixed on the young man and Beale. I stood at the gate and watched them.

There seemed to have been trouble already. Looking more closely I perceived sitting on the grass apart a second young man. His face was obscured by a dirty pocket handkerchief, with which he dabbed tenderly at his features. Every now and then the shirt-sleeved young man flung his hand toward him with an indignant gesture, talking hard the while. It did not need a preternaturally keen observer to deduce what had happened. Beale must have fallen out with the young man who was sitting on the grass and smitten him, and now his friend had taken up the quarrel.

"Now this," I said to myself, "is rather interesting. Here in this one farm we have the only three known methods of dealing with duns. Beale is evidently an exponent of the violent method. Ukridge is an apostle of evasion. I shall try conciliation. I wonder which of us will be the most successful."

Meanwhile, not to spoil Beale's efforts by allowing him too little scope for experiment, I refrained from making my presence known, and continued to stand by the gate, an interested spectator.

Things were evidently moving now. The young man's gestures became more vigorous. The dogged look on Beale's face deepened. The comments of the ring increased in point and pungency.

"What did you hit him for, then?"

This question was put, always in the same words and with the same air of quiet triumph, at intervals of thirty seconds by a little man in a snuff-colored suit with a purple tie. Nobody ever answered him or appeared to listen to him, but he seemed each time to think that he had clinched the matter and cornered his opponent.

Other voices chimed in.

"You hit him, Charlie. Go on. You hit him."

"We'll have the law."

"Go on, Charlie."

Flushed with the favor of the many-headed, Charlie now proceeded from threats to action. His right fist swung round suddenly. But Beale was on the alert. He ducked sharply, and the next minute Charlie was sitting on the ground beside his fallen friend. A hush fell on the ring, and the little man in the purple tie was left repeating his formula without support.

I advanced. It seemed to me that the time had come to be conciliatory. Charlie was struggling to his feet, obviously anxious for a second round, and Beale was getting

into position once more. In another five minutes conciliation would be out of the question.

"What's all this?" I said.

My advent caused a stir. Excited men left Beale and rallied round me. Charlie, rising to his feet, found himself dethroned from his position of man of the moment, and stood blinking at the setting sun and opening and shutting his mouth. There was a buzz of conversation.

"Don't all speak at once, please," I said. "I can't possibly follow what you say. Perhaps you will tell me what you want?"

I singled out a short, stout man in gray. He wore the largest whiskers ever seen on human face.

"It's like this, sir. We all of us want to know where we are."

"I can tell you that," I said, "you're on our lawn, and I should be much obliged if you would stop digging your heels into it."

This was not, I suppose, conciliation in the strictest and best sense of the word, but the thing had to be said.

"You don't understand me, sir," he said excitedly. "When I said we didn't know where we were, it was a manner of speaking. We want to know how we stand."

"On your heels," I replied gently, "as I pointed out before."

"I am Brass, sir, of Axminster. My account with Mr. Ukridge is ten pounds eight shillings and fourpence. I want to know—"

The whole strength of the company now joined in.

"You know me, Mr. Garnet. Appleby, in the High—" (voice lost in the general roar) "... and eightpence."

"My account with Mr. Uk——"

"... settle—"

"I represent Bodger—"

A diversion occurred at this point. Charlie, who had long been eyeing Beale sourly, dashed at him with swinging fists and was knocked down again. The whole trend of the meeting altered once more. Conciliation became a drug. Violence was what the public wanted. Beale had three fights in rapid succession. I was helpless. Instinct prompted me to join the fray, but prudence told me that such a course would be fatal.

At last, in a lull, I managed to catch the hired retainer by the arm as he drew back from the prostrate form of his latest victim.

"Drop it, Beale," I whispered hotly, "drop it. We shall never manage these people if you knock them about. Go indoors and stay there while I talk to them."

"Mr. Garnet, sir," said he, the light of battle dying out of his eyes, "it's 'ard. It's cruel 'ard. I ain't 'ad a turn-up, not to call a turn-up, since I've bin a time-expired man. I ain't hitting of 'em, Mr. Garnet, sir, not hard I ain't. That there first one of 'em he played me dirty, hittin' at me when I wasn't looking. They can't say as I started it."

"That's all right, Beale," I said soothingly. "I know it wasn't your fault, and I know it's hard on you to have to stop, but I wish you would go indoors. I must talk to these men, and we sha'n't have a moment's peace while you're here. Cut along."

"Very well, sir. But it's 'ard. Mayn't I 'ave just one go at that Charlie, Mr. Garnet?" he asked wistfully.

"No, no. Go in."

"And if they goes for you, sir, and tries to wipe the face off you?"

"They won't, they won't. If they do, I'll shout for you."

He went reluctantly into the house, and I turned again to my audience.

"If you will kindly be quiet for a moment—" I said.

"I am Appleby, Mr. Garnet, in the High Street. Mr. Ukridge—"

"Eighteen pounds fourteen shillings—"

"Kindly glance—"

I waved my hands wildly above my head.

"Stop! Stop! Stop!" I shouted.

The babble continued, but diminished gradually in volume. Through the trees, as I waited, I caught a glimpse of the sea. I wished I was out on the Cob, where beyond these voices there was peace. My head was beginning to ache, and I felt faint for want of food.

"Gentlemen!" I cried, as the noise died away.

The latch of the gate clicked. I looked up and saw a tall thin young man in a frock coat and silk hat enter the garden. It was the first time I had seen the costume in the country.

He approached me.

"Mr. Ukridge, sir?" he said.

"My name is Garnet. Mr. Ukridge is away at the moment."

"I come from Whiteley's, Mr. Garnet. Our Mr. Blenkinsop having written on several occasions to Mr. Ukridge, calling his attention to the fact that his account has been allowed to mount to a considerable figure, and having received no satisfactory reply, desired me to visit him. I am sorry that he is not at home."

"So am I," I said with feeling.

"Do you expect him to return shortly?"

"No," I said, "I do not."

He was looking curiously at the expectant band of duns. I forestalled his question.

"Those are some of Mr. Ukridge's creditors," I said. "I am just about to address them. Perhaps you will take a seat. The grass is quite dry. My remarks will embrace

you as well as them."

Comprehension came into his eyes, and the natural man in him peeped through the polish.

"Great Scott, has he done a bunk?" he cried.

"To the best of my knowledge, yes," I said.

He whistled.

I turned again to the local talent.

"Gentlemen!" I shouted.

"Hear, hear!" said some idiot.

"Gentlemen, I intend to be quite frank with you. We must decide just how matters stand between us." (A voice: "Where's Ukridge?") "Mr. Ukridge left for London suddenly (bitter laughter) yesterday afternoon. Personally I think he will come back very shortly."

Hoots of derision greeted this prophecy.

I resumed:

"I fail to see your object in coming here. I have nothing for you. I couldn't pay your bills if I wanted to."

It began to be borne in upon me that I was becoming unpopular.

"I am here simply as Mr. Ukridge's guest," I proceeded. After all, why should I spare the man? "I have nothing whatever to do with his business affairs. I refuse absolutely to be regarded as in any way indebted to you. I am sorry for you. You have my sympathy. That is all I can give you, sympathy—and good advice."

Dissatisfaction. I was getting myself disliked. And I had meant to be so conciliatory, to speak to these unfortunates words of cheer which should be as olive oil poured into a wound. For I really did sympathize with them. I considered that Ukridge had used them disgracefully. But I was irritated. My head ached abominably.

"Then am I to tell our Mr. Blenkinsop," asked the frock-coated one, "that the money is not and will not be forthcoming?"

"When next you smoke a quiet cigar with your Mr. Blenkinsop," I replied courteously, "and find conversation flagging, I rather think I should say something of the sort."

"We shall, of course, instruct our solicitors at once to institute legal proceedings against your Mr. Ukridge."

"Don't call him my Mr. Ukridge. You can do whatever you please."

"That is your last word on the subject."

"I hope so."

"Where's our money?" demanded a discontented voice from the crowd.

Then Charlie, filled with the lust of revenge, proposed that the company should sack the place.

"We can't see the color of our money," he said pithily, "but we can have our own back."

That settled it. The battle was over. The most skillful general must sometimes recognize defeat. I could do nothing further with them. I had done my best for the farm. I could do no more.

I lit my pipe and strolled into the paddock.

Chaos followed. Indoors and out of doors they raged without check. Even Beale gave the thing up. He knocked Charlie into a flower bed and then disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

It was growing dusk. From inside the house came faint sounds of mirth, as the sacking party emptied the rooms of their contents. In the fowl run a hen was crooning sleepily in its coop. It was a very soft, liquid, soothing sound.

Presently out came the invaders with their loot—one with a picture, another with a

vase, another bearing the gramophone upside down.

Then I heard somebody—Charlie again, it seemed to me—propose a raid on the fowl run.

The fowls had had their moments of unrest since they had been our property, but what they had gone through with us was peace compared with what befell them then. Not even on that second evening of our visit, when we had run unmeasured miles in pursuit of them, had there been such confusion. Roused abruptly from their beauty sleep, they fled in all directions. The summer evening was made hideous with the noise of them.

"Disgraceful, sir. Is it not disgraceful!" said a voice at my ear.

The young man from Whiteley's stood beside me. He did not look happy. His forehead was damp. Somebody seemed to have stepped on his hat and his coat was smeared with mold.

I was turning to answer him, when from the dusk in the direction of the house came a sudden roar. A passionate appeal to the world in general to tell the speaker what all this meant.

There was only one man of my acquaintance with a voice like that. I walked without hurry toward him.

"Good evening, Ukridge," I said.

AFTER THE STORM

Chap_23

A

yell of welcome drowned the tumult of the looters.

"Is that you, Garny, old horse? What's up? What's the matter? Has everybody gone mad? Who are those blackguardly scoundrels in the fowl run? What are they doing?

What's been happening?"

"I have been entertaining a little meeting of your creditors," I said. "And now they are entertaining themselves."

"But what did you let them do it for?"

"What is one among so many?" I said.

"Oh," moaned Ukridge, as a hen flashed past us, pursued by a criminal, "it's a little hard. I can't go away for a day—"

"You can't," I said. "You're right there. You can't go away without a word—"

"Without a word? What do you mean? Garny, old boy, pull yourself together. You're overexcited. Do you mean to tell me you didn't get my note?"

"What note?"

"The one I left on the dining-room table."

"There was no note there."

"What!"

I was reminded of the scene that had taken place on the first day of our visit.

"Feel in your pockets," I said.

And history repeated itself. One of the first things he pulled out was the note.

"Why, here it is!" he said in amazement.

"Of course. Where did you expect it to be? Was it important?"

"Why, it explained the whole thing."

"Then," I said, "I wish you'd let me read it. A note that can explain what's happened ought to be worth reading."

I took the envelope from his hand and opened it.

It was too dark to read, so I lit a match. A puff of wind extinguished it. There is always just enough wind to extinguish a match.

I pocketed the note.

"I can't read it now," I said. "Tell me what it was about."

"It was telling you to sit tight and not to worry about us going away—"

"That's good about worrying. You're a thoughtful chap, Ukridge."

"—because we should be back in a day or two."

"And what sent you up to town?"

"Why, we went to touch Millie's Aunt Elizabeth."

A light began to shine on my darkness.

"Oh!" I said.

"You remember Aunt Elizabeth? We got a letter from her not so long ago."

"I know whom you mean. She called you a gaby."

"And a guffin."

"Of course. I remember thinking her a shrewd and discriminating old lady, with a great gift of description. So you went to touch her?"

"That's it. I suddenly found that things were getting into an A1 tangle, and that we must have more money. So I naturally thought of Aunt Elizabeth. She isn't what you might call an admirer of mine, but she's very fond of Millie, and would do anything for her if she's allowed to chuck about a few home-truths before doing it. So we went off together, looked her up at her house, stated our painful case, and corralled the money. Millie and I shared the work. She did the asking, while I inquired after the rheumatism. She mentioned the precise figure that would clear us. I patted the toy Pomeranian. Little beast! Got after me quick, when I wasn't looking, and chewed my ankle."

"Thank Heaven for that," I said.

"In the end Millie got the money and I got the home truths."

"Did she call you a gaby?"

"Twice. And a guffin three times."

"But you got the money?"

"Rather. And I'll tell you another thing. I scored heavily at the end of the visit. Lady Lakenheath was doing stunts with proverbs—"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Quoting proverbs, you know, bearing on the situation. 'Ah, my dear,' she said to Millie, 'marry in haste, repent at leisure!' 'I'm afraid that proverb doesn't apply to us,' said Millie, 'because I haven't repented.' What do you think of that, old horse?"

"Millie's an angel," I replied.

Just then the angel joined us. She had been exploring the house, and noting the damage done. Her eyes were open to their fullest extent as she shook hands with me.

"Oh, Mr. Garnet," she said, "couldn't you have stopped them?"

I felt a cur. Had I done as much as I might have done to stem the tide?

"I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Ukridge," I said. "I really don't think I could have done more. We tried every method. Beale had seven fights, and I made a speech on the lawn, but it was all no good."

"Perhaps we can collect these men and explain things," I added. "I don't believe any of them know you've come back."

"Send Beale round," said Ukridge. "Beale!"

The hired retainer came running out at the sound of the well-known voice.

"Lumme, Mr. Ukridge, sir!" he gasped.

It was the first time Beale had ever betrayed any real emotion in my presence. To him, I suppose, the return of Ukridge was as sensational and astounding an event as the reappearance of one from the tomb would have been. He was not accustomed to

find those who had shot the moon revisiting their old haunts.

"Go round the place and tell those blackguards that I've come back, and would like to have a word with them on the lawn. And if you find any of them stealing my fowls, knock them down."

"I 'ave knocked down one or two," said Beale with approval. "That Charlie—"

"That's right, Beale. You're an excellent man, and I will pay you your back wages to-night before I go to bed."

"Those fellers, sir," said Beale, having expressed his gratification, "they've been and scattered most of them birds already, sir. They've been chasin' of 'em for this hour back."

Ukridge groaned.

"Demons!" he said. "Demons!"

Beale went off.

The audience assembled on the lawn in the moonlight. Ukridge, with his cap well over his eyes and his mackintosh hanging around him like a Roman toga, surveyed them stonily, and finally began his speech.

"You—you—you—you blackguards!" he said.

I always like to think of Ukridge as he appeared at that moment. There have been times when his conduct did not recommend itself to me. It has sometimes happened that I have seen flaws in him. But on this occasion he was at his best. He was eloquent. He dominated his audience.

He poured scorn upon his hearers, and they quailed. He flung invective at them, and they wilted.

It was hard, he said, it was a little hard that a gentleman could not run up to London for a couple of days on business without having his private grounds turned upside down. He had intended to deal well by the tradesmen of the town, to put business in

their way, to give them large orders. But would he? Not much. As soon as ever the sun had risen and another day begun, their miserable accounts should be paid in full and their connection with him be cut off. Afterwards it was probable that he would institute legal proceedings against them for trespass and damage to property, and if they didn't all go to prison they might consider themselves uncommonly lucky, and if they didn't fly the spot within the brief space of two ticks he would get among them with a shotgun. He was sick of them. They were no gentlemen, but cads. Scoundrels. Creatures that it would be rank flattery to describe as human beings. That's the sort of things they were. And now they might go—quick!

The meeting then dispersed, without the usual vote of thanks.

We were quiet at the farm that night. Ukridge sat like Marius among the ruins of Carthage and refused to speak. Eventually he took Bob with him and went for a walk.

Half an hour later I, too, wearied of the scene of desolation. My errant steps took me in the direction of the sea. As I approached I was aware of a figure standing in the moonlight, gazing moodily out over the waters. Beside the figure was a dog.

I would not disturb his thoughts. The dark moments of massive minds are sacred. I forebore to speak to him. As readily might one of the generals of the Grand Army have opened conversation with Napoleon during the retreat from Moscow.

I turned softly and walked the other way. When I looked back he was still there.

"I did think Mr. Garnet would have fainted when the best man said, 'I can't find it, old horse!'" "I did think Mr. Garnet would have fainted when the best man said, 'I can't find it, old horse!'"

EPILOGUE

Argument. From the Morning Post: "... and graceful, wore a simple gown of stiff

satin and old lace, and a heavy lace veil fell in soft folds over the shimmering skirt. A reception was subsequently held by Mrs. O'Brien, aunt of the bride, at her house in Ennismore Gardens."

IN THE SERVANTS' HALL

The Cook. ... And as pretty a wedding, Mr. Hill, as ever I did see.

The Butler. Indeed, Mrs. Minchley? And how did our niece look?

The Cook (closing her eyes in silent rapture). Well, there! That lace! (In a burst of ecstacy.) Well, there!! Words can't describe it, Mr. Hill.

The Butler. Indeed, Mrs. Minchley?

The Cook. And Miss Phyllis—Mrs. Garnet, I should say—she was as calm as calm. And looking beautiful as—well, there! Now, Mr. Garnet, he did look nervous, if you like, and when the best man—such a queer-looking awkward man, in a frock coat that I wouldn't have been best man at a wedding in—when he lost the ring and said—quite loud, everybody could hear him—"I can't find it, old horse!" why I did think Mr. Garnet would have fainted away, and so I said to Jane, as was sitting beside me. But he found it at the last moment, and all went on as merrily, as you may say, as a wedding bell.

Jane (sentimentally). Reely, these weddings, you know, they do give you a sort of feeling, if you catch my meaning, Mrs. Minchley.

The Butler (with the air of a high priest who condescends for once to unbend and frolic with lesser mortals). Ah! it'll be your turn next, Miss Jane.

Jane (who has long had designs on this dignified bachelor). Oh, Mr. Hill, reely! You do poke your fun.

[Raises her eyes to his, and drops them swiftly, leaving him with a pleasant sensation of having said a good thing particularly neatly, and a growing idea that he might do worse than marry Jane, take a nice little house in Chelsea somewhere, and

let lodgings. He thinks it over.

Tilby (a flighty young person who, when she has a moment or two to spare from the higher flirtation with the local policeman, puts in a little light work about the bedrooms). Oh, I say, this'll be one in the eye for Riggetts, pore little feller. (Assuming an air of advanced melodrama.) Ow! She 'as forsiken me! I'll go and blow me little 'ead off with a blunderbuss! Ow that one so fair could be so false!

Master Thomas Riggetts (the page boy, whose passion for the lady who has just become Mrs. Garnet has for many months been a byword in the servants' hall). Huh! (To himself bitterly.) Tike care, tike care, lest some day you drive me too far. [Is left brooding darkly.

UPSTAIRS

The Bride. ... Thank you.... Oh, thank you.... Thank you so much.... Thank you so much ... oh, thank you.... Thank you.... Thank you so much.

The Bridegroom. Thanks.... Oh, thanks.... Thanks awf'lly.... Thanks awf'lly.... Thanks awf'lly.... Oh, thanks awf'lly ... (with a brilliant burst of invention, amounting almost to genius) Thanks frightfully.

The Bride (to herself, rapturously). A-a-a-h!

The Bridegroom (dabbing at his forehead with his handkerchief during a lull). I shall drop.

The Best Man (appearing suddenly at his side with a glass). Bellows to mend, old horse, what? Keep going. You're doing fine. Bless you. Bless you.

[Drifts away.

Elderly Stranger (to bridegroom). Sir, I have jigged your wife on my knee.

The Bridegroom (with absent politeness). Ah! Lately?

Elderly Stranger. When she was a baby, sir.

The Bridegroom (from force of habit). Oh, thanks. Thanks awf'lly.

The Bride (to herself). Why can't one get married every day!... (catching sight of a young gentleman whose bi-weekly conversation with her in the past was wont to consist of two remarks on the weather and one proposal of marriage). Oh! Oh, what a shame inviting poor little Freddy Fraddle! Aunt Kathleen must have known! How could she be so cruel! Poor little fellow, he must be suffering dreadfully!

Poor Little Freddy Fraddle (addressing his immortal soul as he catches sight of the bridegroom, with a set smile on his face, shaking hands with an obvious bore). Poor devil, poor, poor devil! And to think that I—! Well, well! There but for the grace of God goes Frederick Fraddle.

The Bridegroom (to the Obvious Bore). Thanks. Thanks awf'lly.

The Obvious Bore (in measured tones).... are going, as you say, to Wales for your honeymoon, you should on no account miss the opportunity of seeing the picturesque ruins of Llanxwrg Castle, which are among the most prominent spectacles of Carnarvonshire, a county, which I understand you to say, you propose to include in your visit. The ruins are really part of the village of Twdyd-Prtsplgnd, but your best station would be Golgdn. There is a good train service to and from that spot. If you mention my name to the custodian of the ruins, he will allow you to inspect the grave of the celebrated ——

Immaculate Youth (interrupting). Hello, Garnet, old man. Don't know if you remember me. Latimer, of Oriel. I was a fresher in your third year. Gratters!

The Bridegroom (with real sincerity for once). Thanks. Thanks awf'lly.

[They proceed to talk Oxford shop together, to the exclusion of the O. B., who glides off in search of another victim.

IN THE STREET

The Coachman (to his horse). Kim up, then!

The Horse (to itself). Deuce of a time these people are. Why don't they hurry. I want

to be off. I'm certain we shall miss that train.

The Best Man (to crowd of perfect strangers, with whom in some mysterious way he has managed to strike up a warm friendship). Now, then, you men, stand by. Wait till they come out, then blaze away. Good handful first shot. That's what you want.

The Cook (in the area, to Jane). Oh, I do 'ope they won't miss that train, don't you? Oh, here they come. Oh, don't Miss Phyllis—Mrs. Garnet—look—well, there. And I can remember her a little slip of a girl only so high, and she used to come to my kitchen, and she used to say, "Mrs. Minchley," she used to say—it seems only yesterday—"Mrs. Minchley, I want—"

[Left reminiscing.

The Bride (as the page boy's gloomy eye catches hers, "smiles as she was wont to smile").

Master Riggetts (with a happy recollection of his latest-read work of fiction—"Sir Rupert of the Hall": Meadowsweet Library—to himself). "Good-by, proud lady. Fare you well. And may you never regret. May—you—nevorrr—regret!"

[Dives passionately into larder, and consoles himself with jam.

The Best Man (to his gang of bravoes). Now, then, you men, bang it in.

[They bang it in.

The Bridegroom (retrieving his hat). Oh— [Recollects himself in time.

The Best Man. Oh, shot, sir! Shot, indeed!

[The Bride and Bridegroom enter the carriage amid a storm of rice.

The Best Man (coming to carriage window). Garny, old horse.

The Bridegroom. Well?

The Best Man. Just a moment. Look here, I've got a new idea. The best ever, 'pon my word it is. I'm going to start a duck farm and run it without water. What? You'll miss your train? Oh, no, you won't. There's plenty of time. My theory is, you see,

that ducks get thin by taking exercise and swimming about and so on, don't you know, so that, if you kept them on land always, they'd get jolly fat in about half the time—and no trouble and expense. See? What? You bring the missus down there. I'll write you the address. Good-by. Bless you. Good-by, Mrs. Garnet.

The Bride and Bridegroom (simultaneously, with a smile apiece). Good-by.

[They catch the train and live happily ever afterwards.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE AMONG THE CHICKENS ***

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