ANYMOON

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BIOGRAPHY

SOME DISTINGUISHED VICTIMS OF THE SCAFFOLD.

THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL DUCHESS.

LADIES FAIR AND FRAIL.

THE LIFE OF JOHN WILKES.

FICTION

TALES OF THE STUMPS.

MORE TALES OF THE STUMPS.

A GENTLEMAN OF THE ROAD.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

HIS JOB.

ANYMOON

BY HORACE BLEACKLEY

WITH A FOREWORD BY HAROLD COX

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FOREWORD

IN writing *Anymoon* Mr. Horace Bleackley has aimed at giving a picture of the way in which Socialistic theories, now so vigorously preached, would work out in practice. Though presented in the form of a novel the book in the truest sense is not a work of fiction. It is a careful and logical deduction from the premises laid down by the high priests of Socialism in their own pseudo-scientific propagandist writings. They enunciate the principles on which they wish society to be organised; Mr. Bleackley shows what the necessary consequences will be. By adopting, however, the form of a novel he is able to give prominence to the human factors in the problem. That is not only a point of attraction to the average reader, but it is also in accordance with the facts of political life. Everyone who has had any intimacy with politics knows that often what appear to be well-thought-out proposals based upon high principles are in reality the casual products of a single restless brain whose owner happens to be in a position to influence the political machine. To ignore the personal element in politics is to forget the teaching of history. But personalities, however masterful, cannot alter the main facts of human nature, and these finally determine the organisation of human society. Socialistic theories fail in practice because they are at variance with basic human instincts — the love of liberty, the desire for

personal possessions, the attraction of sex and the parent's preference for his own children. The working out of these instincts by imperfect beings in an imperfect world, though it brings much happiness to many, leaves a large number at a low level of existence and some in actual misery. This is the starting-point of the whole Socialistic propaganda. The elaborate projects for the State organisation of all industry would never appeal to the masses unless Socialists argued that so only can inequalities of fortune be swept away. Socialists, in fact, are compelled to advocate the ideal of equality in order to popularise their creed. But it is a false ideal. Not only does it conflict with the facts of all animated life, but it cannot be attained even in the restricted sphere of economic wealth except by the sacrifice of other human instincts, which are at least as insistent as the desire for equality or the spirit of envy. That is the ultimate reason why all schemes for establishing a new social order on the basis of equality have failed and must fail.

HAROLD COX.

ANYMOON

"It is better that some should be unhappy, than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality."

Dr. Johnson.

ANYMOON

PART I

THE GREAT UPHEAVAL

I

JOSEPH ANYMOON, the first President of the British Commonwealth, was pacing the Tapestry Room of St. James's Palace with wide, exultant strides. The whole aspect of the man betokened buoyancy, self-reliance and an indomitable driving-power. He was tall, heavy of bone and obviously the possessor of splendid health. Anyone looking at him would have learnt by a glance that he had always been a worker, who was proud and happy in his work.

His face was in accord with his vigorous frame, bold, aggressive and somewhat coarse of mould, the face of one who had been accustomed both to give and to receive hard blows. The crisp brown hair, receding from his forehead, exposed a dome-like brow, the skin of which was pink and polished, and beneath which a pair of alert blue eyes looked forth with an expression half of suspicion and half of defiance. Pink, too, was the skin of his broad, straight nose and his wide nostrils, but the colour deepened to the brightest crimson upon his smooth cheeks, enhancing the appearance of youth and virility, which most people agreed was remarkable in a man of fifty. Except for a pair of small, close-clipped side-

whiskers there was no hair upon his face, and his thick, clean-shaven lips and firm jaws—blue in tinge by reason of a strong beard—were well shaped and masculine. No casual observer would have imagined that the first President of the British Commonwealth was more than thirty-five.

Yet his more audacious enemies—and, as is the case with every successful climber, they were legion—were never tired of asserting that in spite of its aspect of pugnacity his countenance did not altogether convey the impression that he was a natural leader of men. There was a suggestion of flabbiness about him, they persisted, subtle, negative and scarcely expressed, but a suggestion nevertheless of unmistakable flabbiness, which indicated that in place of firmness he might possess merely obstinacy and that his combativeness might be only a disguise to cloak his timidity. Although they were compelled to agree that he was endowed with an energy and perseverance that was truly admirable they reiterated boldly that Anymoon essentially was a pliable man. They alleged moreover that he had achieved his ascendancy owing to the fact that his career had followed the line of least resistance, or, in other words, that he was but an inevitable phenomenon of the spirit of the age. And the spirit of his age was antagonistic to the superman and the conqueror.

There was one quality, however, the possession of which even the most censorious never attempted to deny him. He was blessed to the full with the divine gift of humour. It was indicated perpetually by the mischievous dots and curves around his broad lips, and revealed itself from time to time when a wicked twinkle stole into his defiant blue eyes. The common people, who rejoiced in his somewhat elephantine eloquence, would never have loved him as they did, had he not endeared himself to them by his bonhomie and merriment, and they decided very shrewdly that a man with laughter in his heart possessed the first essential attribute of a king amongst men.

It was in vain that the envious strove to dub him a

mere jester, likening him to John Wilkes, and casting doubts upon his sincerity, alleging that all through his career he had been a mountebank and a juggler who owed his position and popularity to playing to the gallery. Secure in his position of President of the Republic, Anymoon answered all these with a tempestuous torrent of quips and jests, agreeing with a burst of laughter that, like every human being, he thought always of self in the first place, but, since all were now members of a communistic State, that a man could not help benefiting his fellow-citizens to the greatest extent by looking after Number One. And the proletariat, conscious that he read human nature rightly and grateful to him for his services in overturning the old régime, was pleased to laugh with him. Everyone realised that Joseph Anymoon, whether he was only a dunce or in reality a heaven-born statesman, had been one of the chief causes of the greatest social and political change in the history of Great Britain since the power of the barons had been fretted away by the Wars of the Roses and the hierarchy of Rome had been extinguished by the Reformation.

His thoughts were full of this Great Change and his share in it—this great social upheaval that had taken place only two years before—as he strode restlessly up and down the tapestry-covered "Old Presence Chamber" on this particular afternoon, waiting for the meeting of the Council of State. Through the open door, in Queen Anne's Drawing Room adjoining, the long narrow baize-covered table was set forth for the monthly conclave of the nation's rulers over which he was shortly to preside. It was owing to his suggestion that these communistic assemblies took place in the ancient palace of the British kings, a stroke of ironical humour which was much appreciated by all who welcomed the new régime. An iconoclastic touch such as this would, so he fancied, have rejoiced the heart of Oliver Cromwell, who in his secret soul he believed was a man very near akin to himself.

He strolled through the open door into Queen Anne's

Drawing Room and surveyed himself in one of the long pier glasses between the windows. His gaze swept over the reflection of the round pink forehead, the long blunt nose, the large blue eyes and the mobile resolute lips, and he nodded his head critically. There was a small wart on the lower part of his left cheek, which he surveyed with satisfaction.

"A likeness," he muttered, "an unmistakable likeness. . . . No wonder they call me 'Old Noll.' . . . I must try to live up to the standard."

After a swift and scornful glance at the baize table with its twin rows of blotting-pads and ink-pots, where his councillors were soon to assemble, he returned slowly with his hands behind his back into the "Old Presence Chamber." Sauntering leisurely around the apartment, he began to examine the tapestries, made for King Charles I, with an indulgent smile, chuckling to himself approvingly.

"A vandal would have destroyed all this as a relic of kingcraft," he muttered, tossing his head with scorn. "They did things like that in the French Revolution. . . . How far we have progressed since those days. . . . How much higher I shall stand than Danton or Robespierre!"

He halted before the beautiful old fire-place, regarding the entwined initials of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn with a frown of displeasure.

"Oh, those bad old days," he growled, shaking his fist at the carving, "and to think that they endured even to our own times. . . . There was as little personal liberty under the Guelphs as under the Tudors."

A long deep breath of satisfaction came pouring from his broad chest.

"*Nous avons changé tout cela.* . . . We have touched bed-rock at last. . . . The Universal Brotherhood of Man will be eternal . . . and to think that it is I who have brought about this Great Change."

He struck his clenched fist into the palm of his left hand exultantly. Besides being a great social reformer Anymoon was also a stupendous optimist.

II

THE Great Upheaval, for which Joseph Anymoon was mainly responsible, had come about with incredible swiftness and had been accomplished with the utmost ease. During the long martyrdom of the World's War the minds of all mankind had been seeking new ideals, searching frantically for some universal panacea that would bring security and happiness for all time to poor suffering humanity. Catchwords, blurted out by the superficial, which were bandied from lip to lip while the frightful Armageddon endured, seemed to acquire the sanctity of Holy Writ, since they suggested a promise of the millennium. The blessed word "Democracy" was spoken as though it was the name of an infallible patent drug, and people said, without knowing the meaning of what they said: "We shall never return to the *state of things* before the war," or, "*Things* will never be the same again when the war is over." All confidently expected a new heaven and a new earth to arise almost spontaneously, with the aid of a little coaxing by mortal hands, directly the war had ended.

But peace came, and, after a short period of industrial unrest, nothing extraordinary happened. Instead, everyone appeared to be imbued with an inordinate desire to begin again as they had left off in the August of 1914. The draper's assistant flew back eagerly to his counter, the clerk returned with gladness to his desk in the city, the footman heaved a sigh of relief when he found himself once more on the seat of his lady's car. All rejoiced to have seen the last of the trenches, happy that they were no longer targets for the guns of the Boches. An era of peace and contentment seemed to have dawned—the inevitable reaction after the long agony of blood and tears.

It was the same with the women. True to their sex, the great majority harked back to kitchen and nuptial couch joyously, devoutly thankful to have their boys

home again at last. The most zealous munitioneer downed her tools without reluctance at the sound of wedding bells and set herself to the task of increasing the population of the world as efficiently as she had striven to fabricate the weapons to diminish it. The W.A.A.C. and the Land Girl were soon busy rocking cradles and washing clothes, without a regretful thought of the glamour of a khaki uniform or the splendid freedom of breeches and gaiters. All were content to be as women wish to be who love their lords, and the style of feminine dress became as it was at the close of the French Revolution and for the same reason. Even the spinster who could not find a mate ceased to be an economic cipher, for there was work for her in abundance and she was no longer the rebellious outcast of the Labour world.

The first General Election under the Representation of the People Act took place, seven hundred and seven members of the House of Commons were returned to Westminster, and still things went on very much in the same way. Education Bills were put into force, roping in the shallow-pated youth and the promising indiscriminately, and a colossal and benevolent scheme for the Housing of the Poor was carried into effect by employing a herd of unworthy architects to disfigure the landscape with thousands of unsightly dwelling-places. But beyond this there was no great social metamorphosis. Men and women were too engrossed in the favourite human pastime of making money—all the more necessary now because of the crushing taxation—to allow politics to interfere with business. Although there were a few strikes, everyone was too absorbed in building-up to dream of pulling-down. As a matter of course, there were more Labour Members in the House of Commons than formerly, but these, like their predecessors, adapted themselves speedily to their environment—sleek and well-fed citizens, who realised soon enough that they had reached a sanctuary, where, for five or six years, the wicked would cease from troubling and the weary be at rest.

Yet the very apathy with which the nation regarded its Parliament was an outward and visible sign of an impending cataclysm. In human institutions, as in the works of nature, there can be no stagnation, and what does not flourish must, of necessity, fade. Long before the close of the Great War the Mother of Parliaments had ceased to be an object of veneration, while the politician had lost most of his former prestige. Old men marvelled as they recalled the halo which popular esteem had placed upon the brow of the statesman until almost the dawn of the twentieth century. But now even the features of the rulers were unfamiliar to the man in the street. During the sunset of Victorian days the appearance of a man with a Randolphian moustache would attract a clamorous multitude. During the Great War Mr. Winston Churchill might have walked along Piccadilly unrecognised and unobserved. The eye-glass of Joseph Chamberlain had been a national landmark, but the very countenance of Mr. Asquith, in his old age, was known to very few. It can be alleged without exaggeration that nine men out of every ten could have drawn an accurate pattern of the Gladstonian collar in the year 1895, but not one in every twenty would have identified Mr. Lloyd George amidst a queue in the yard of a police station in the year 1918. The Parliamentarian had fallen from his pedestal, and, although few realised the fact, Parliament was tottering too.

It was at this juncture that Anymoon divulged his scheme of reform to a startled nation.

"The Three Estates of the Realm are an anachronism," he insisted, "and the most rotten of the three is the House of Commons. . . . Let us shut up the lot of them!"

In season and out of season, on tub and on platform, and in council chamber, the brand-new demagogue persisted in his demand with all the fire and energy of a modern Camille Desmoulins.

"The House of Commons is rotten. . . . Shut it up!"

And the nation first endured, then pitied, and then embraced him.

Joseph Anymoon, almost unknown to fame until the conclusion of the Great War, had made himself a great political force with wonderful rapidity. The fifth son of a small grocer in Putney, he had begun his business career some forty years previously as office-boy to a firm of accountants in the city. At the age of twenty he had changed his trade, becoming clerk to a lawyer of Semitic origin, whose services were often utilised by some of the great Trade Unions. In this employment he passed the hey-day of his life, drawing an ample salary, and coming into contact with many of the notabilities of the Labour world. Of industrious habits and eager to improve his mind and increase his powers as a public speaker, he spent most of his leisure hours at the Free Library and the Debating Society. Finally, when more than forty years old, he took the first great step of his life by founding the Amalgamated Corporation of National Clerks, of which he was appointed the sole secretary. Having a great Trade Union at his back, and being a capable organiser, full of new ideas and almost a genius in figures, he soon became a person of consequence amongst all who were interested in Social Reform. Although he did not join any of the innumerable socialistic cliques his opinions were known to be of the most extreme and far-reaching character. Nevertheless, no one had anticipated that he was capable of promulgating such a drastic proposal as shutting up the House of Commons.

Many of his colleagues, and especially the exasperated Labour Members, unanimous for the first time, did their level best to effect the shutting up of Anymoon instead, but he was pachydermatous and had a voice of brass.

"P.M.G. . . . Parliament Must Go," he vociferated day after day.

And P.M.G. soon became one of the most popular of the new national catch-words.

III

LET it not be imagined that Anymoon was a mere vulgar demagogue. In spite of his humble origin and subordinate occupation he had always possessed good manners, everyone regarding him from his boyhood upwards as vastly superior to his actual station in life. A legacy of fifty pounds a year, left to him in early youth by a godfather, had enabled him to gratify a natural good taste in dress and to spend his annual holiday in Continental travel. It had also given him the chance of coming into contact with his social superiors at theatres and minor restaurants, where, being imitative and observant, he had learnt much that was foreign to the environment in which he had been born. In order to get rid of a Cockney accent he had taken elocution lessons until the object was achieved. But one of the chief reasons why he was not as other men of his class was because of his marriage, at the age of thirty, to the plump and placid daughter of a scientific recluse whose acquaintance he had made while attending a course of lectures on art at a technical school. The scientific parent, a mild and self-absorbed old gentleman in the throes of locomotor ataxy, offered no opposition to the match, and when he died a few months later he bequeathed an income of nearly four hundred pounds a year to the happy pair. Never short of money throughout his life Anymoon had always been able to gratify his fastidious inclinations.

"P.M.G. . . . Parliament Must Go!"

About the time that Anymoon enunciated his war-cry the apathy with which the people had regarded their legislative Assembly for many years was degenerating into a feeling of mistrust and contempt. When the nation had begun to look back upon the incidents of the Great War with critical inquisitiveness it realised with amaze-

ment that the Parliament, which was supposed to be its safeguard and protector, had played it false. A cruel war had been forced upon Great Britain at a time when she was wholly unprepared. While a hostile nation was piling up armaments with the sole object of crushing the free peoples of Europe the statesmen of England had been indifferent or asleep. Their neglect to *warn* their fellow-countrymen of their danger appeared almost as criminal as the action of the tyrant who had brought about the deluge of blood. The House of Commons was the trustee for the safety of the nation and it had failed in its trust!

With the mild impassibility of a flock of sheep the people watched and waited, believing that justice would be inflicted—swift, complete, remorseless justice—upon the wrong-doers. A punishment was expected that would fit the crime, a condign and adequate punishment, which would deter those who succeeded the recreant trustees from ever again jeopardising the freedom of their native land. But dog will not eat dog, and the House of Commons declined to inflict punishment on itself. Popular opinion was impotent, for even a General Election was of no avail. The great public was, as always, at the mercy of the Caucus and the Committee, who selected the vast majority of the parliamentary candidates and merely gave the electorate the opportunity of voting for A. or for B. And A. and B. of course, whether Liberals or Tories, Labour men or Socialists, were of the same type as their predecessors, mere party politicians imbued with the freemasonry of party politics.

Then the clarion note of Anymoon rang forth throughout the land.

"Down with the House of Commons. . . . It is a back number!"

It was impolite—the sentiment was unfamiliar, and yet it expressed in robust words what many men had been thinking for many a long year. The Press and public began to take stock of their representative Assembly—accomplishing a careful, meticulous, exhaustive stock-

taking—and a low growl of protest reverberated from one end of the nation to the other. Of the seven hundred and seven members of the House of Commons two hundred and fifty had received baronetcies, and there were three hundred and eleven simple knights, shrewd and aspiring souls, who had given up to party what was never meant for mankind. One hundred and sixty-two of the specially-elect held office under Government with appropriate salaries, while the flotsam and jetsam of the House had been placated by the gift of promiscuous letters of the alphabet to superadd to their surnames, appendages often as clangorous and invidious as the tin kettle fastened by other mischief-makers to a dog's tail. Once more honours had been scattered so lavishly that only half a dozen M.P.'s were destitute of a title or posterior initials and these six were the heirs to ancient peerages. There were seven ex-Lord Chancellors!

But although Anymoon was well aware that the name of politician stank in the nostrils of his fellow-countrymen, he was too sagacious a man to place his trust in popular opinion. He knew that reform was always effected by a small band of stalwarts and that the supine and tolerant British Public would never take matters into their own hands.

"In the Orient, if you want to get your way, you must bribe *individuals*," he was always telling his friends. "And in England, where graft is just as essential, you must bribe *factions*."

And so, in order to extinguish the old order of things and demolish the Three Estates of the Realm in one clean swoop, he offered a stupendous bribe to the local authorities of Great Britain.

"Follow my lead," he said to them in effect, "and I will give you sovereign power."

It was the simplest and yet the most effective bait that a reformer has ever chosen and the municipalities of the kingdom swallowed it like hungry trout. At the next General Election the old herd of party candidates found themselves opposed in the great majority of constituencies

by uncompromising competitors chosen by the local authorities.

And the platform cry of the new faction was "P.M.G. Parliament Must Go!"

The nation responded to the war-cry with rapture. In the next House of Commons the "Anymooners," as the new members were called, numbered no less than five hundred. Each of them had but one purpose in view, and their voting power was irresistible. Anymoon himself, who had thought it beneath his dignity to become an M.P., directed operations from outside.

The ensuing session was one of the shortest in the history of the British Parliament, lasting precisely for six weeks. At its close the gigantic act of *hari-kari* had been committed and the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the members of the House of Commons had ceased to exist. There was no opposition to the will of the Anymoon party. Directly the BILL OF SELF-ABNEGATION, as the *Daily Mail* termed it, had passed its second reading in the Lower Chamber the Peers immediately acquiesced in it, preferring sudden death to a lingering and ignominious dissolution under the provisions of the Parliament Act. Then the House of Commons finished off its business by decreeing a British Commonwealth, with Joseph Anymoon as first President.

The new Constitution was extraordinarily simple. The whole of Great Britain and Ireland was divided into twenty-two equal electoral districts, each governed by a Local Commune, elected by universal suffrage, which, subject to the control of a National Council, had supreme legislative power in its own state. A few superstitious purists objected to the ill-omened number, but the memory of the public is short and the protest received little or no support. At the close of each year a third of the members of every Commune had to retire in rotation. The Central Government—an easy task since so many functions had been delegated to the local authorities—was placed in the hands of a National Council of Twenty-two, one councillor chosen by each Commune and holding

office for only one year. And the chairman of this Assembly was, of course, ex officio, the President himself. Anymoon prided himself, and most people agreed with him, that he had carried the principle of decentralisation to its utmost possible limits.

Friction between the Council and the Communes was almost an impossibility, by reason of their close relationship and because an undesirable councillor could be extinguished by his electoral college at the end of three years. Moreover, it had been the object of the framers of the Constitution to make the National Council a benevolent despot, a doge-like senate that would merely reflect the popular will. By encouraging local esprit de corps and by allowing each district to control its own affairs it was hoped to build up, on the American pattern, a perfect community of federated states.

Naturally, many of the old Government Departments ceased to exist. The Local Government Board, for example, was transmogrified into a sort of combination of a London club and a Technical School for municipal councillors, where they could obtain a cheap lunch and attend lectures in the higher branches of political philosophy. Likewise, the Board of Trade became a species of Imperial Institute, in which the captains of industry—who, with the advent of Communism, were merely captains and not individual proprietors—met for the interchange of ideas and to take counsel with highly-trained specialists. The functions of the Treasury, however, which was affiliated with the Bank of England, were largely extended, for it was now the national Clearing House, through which, since taxation was no longer necessary under a socialistic régime, the profits of industry were apportioned in their proper ratio amongst the various Local Communes.

The Admiralty had vanished, being wholly unnecessary, as the principle of a League of Nations was now an established fact, and the Commonwealth of Great Britain maintained only a dozen fast cruisers and a few score of destroyers as its share of an international navy to police

and protect the seas. Gone, too, was the Colonial Office, every Crown Colony, as well as Canada, South Africa and Australasia, having become free and independent commonwealths, cut adrift absolutely from the Mother Land. The War Office, nevertheless, was preserved under the title of the National Service Board, since every citizen was compelled to submit to a course of compulsory military training, for purposes of hygiene and discipline, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-one.

Many other familiar institutions had also been swept away. The Home Office had disappeared, with its adjunct Scotland Yard, its duties having been delegated to the local authorities, each of which appointed its own judges and was responsible entirely for law and order within its own demesne. The Foreign Office was no more, passing to its doom unwept, unhonoured and unsung, except by a handful of superannuated civil servants, and the President and his board of secretaries, subject to the approval of the National Council, nominated the Ambassadors abroad—now styled Commissionaires—and conducted all negotiations with the various Powers. It was the sole power of initiative granted to him, and since every official telegram from a foreign country had to be published by law in the *Times* and the *Daily Mail*—now national property like the rest of the public press—it did not amount to very much. But most beneficent innovation of all, in the opinion of Anymoon and his followers, was the conversion of the Houses of Parliament into a National Laboratory, where the most distinguished scientists of the realm, selected by competitive examination, pursued their researches, as long as they gave proof of their efficiency, in the interests of the commonweal.

Such was the brand-new Constitution that Joseph Anymoon and his advisers had imposed upon the people of Great Britain and Ireland after a swift and irresistible agitation, which, from start to finish, lasted for little more than nine months. Small wonder that he should be pacing the floor of the "Old Presence Chamber" of St. James's Palace with exultation in his heart on this

particular afternoon, two years after the birth of the new Republic, while he reflected with pride upon the mighty achievement that he had accomplished.

His eye rested again upon the initials of Henry and Anne and his lips curled with a smile of triumph.

"My bantling has come safely through the ills of infancy. . . . It is a lusty child. . . . There is no fear as regards its future."

Most parents, owing to a merciful dispensation of providence, are usually optimistic at the onset with regard to the creatures that they have brought into the world. And some of the greatest men and women in history have been incorrigible egotists.

IV

He strode once more to the entrance leading into Queen Anne's Drawing Room and closed the door with a bang. Then, drawing up an arm-chair towards the fire-place, in the grate of which a pile of logs was blazing, for it was a chilly afternoon in early May, he threw himself luxuriously into the cushions and lighted a cigarette. The weekly assemblage of the Council was to take place at half-past two and until the proceedings began he wished for privacy in order to think over the business of the meeting.

Presently, the door leading from the Armoury was thrown open and a large man, with a hairless, lemon-coloured face and a bald head, walked heavily into the room. The President glanced up petulantly, but his brow cleared as his eyes rested upon the intruder.

"Oh, it's you, Crannock."

The new-comer, who under the old régime had been a lawyer of some eminence, was one of Anymoon's most trusted friends, a safe, slow, level-headed man, who had been one of the chief engineers of the great revolution.

Taking a handsome gold case from his pocket, Crannock placed a cigarette between his fleshy lips, and after striking a light he deposited himself in front of the fireplace with his hands behind his back and his sturdy legs thrust wide apart, puffing nonchalantly. Anymoon regarded his aide-de-camp with an indulgent smile.

"That's a nice suit of clothes," he remarked at last, with an index finger pointing in the direction of his friend's waistcoat.

The obese Crannock glanced down somewhat self-consciously at his well-cut blue serge garments. Like all the most eminent of the State officials he was privileged to obtain his clothes from one of the Guilds of National Tailors (Grade Number One) in Savile Row.

"Yes," he answered, after a pause, manœuvring his cigarette into the corner of his capacious mouth, "they've not made a botch of it this time."

"You're luckier than me," growled Anymoon impatiently. "My things always look as if they'd been cut out with a cleaver and stitched with a skewer. . . . And I'm hanged if it's a question of figure."

And his eye wandered over Crannock's protuberant vest resentfully.

"They've got just the same staff that they had in the old days when they were Poole's," Crannock murmured, taking the cigarette from his mouth and frowning darkly. "But somehow or other they will not realise that efficient work is just as essential now—indeed far more essential since we are all on our trial—as it was under the old competition system."

And the smooth, hairless arches, where his eyebrows should have been, were creased for an instant with an expression of disapprobation. Anymoon, with a deprecatory snort, interrupted quickly.

"Humbug, Crannock," he said in a loud voice, "there's no question about being 'on our trial'! . . . Things are as they are, and they've come to stay. . . . There's no alternative."

"Except evolution," answered Crannock quietly.

"Precisely," added Anymoon, appeased. "Things will right themselves in time. . . . But I wish our tailors would show a little more public spirit and take a proper pride in their work."

"Well, it's not all beer and skittles being a tailor," said Crannock indulgently.

"I'd persuade the Council to dock their wages," continued Anymoon menacingly. "But such a step would be utterly reactionary."

"Yes," agreed Crannock, passing a hand over his bald head, "the Communes wouldn't stand it."

Glancing darkly at his ill-fitting clothes, Anymoon flung the end of his cigarette into the grate. In the twentieth century even such trifling matters as sartorial details often have disturbed the equanimity of eminent statesmen. For, as a latter-day philosopher has well put it, the characteristic of modern times is "the apotheosis of the insignificant," and we all now appreciate the importance of small things.

"How did you manage to get them to turn out a suit like that?" Anymoon demanded, after a pause.

Crannock hesitated for a moment, a slight spasm of diffidence flickering over his expansive features. Then he spoke in a low, regretful voice.

"I tipped them!"

"You tipped them?"

"Half a guinea to the cutter, and a pound amongst the hands."

Anymoon sprang to his feet impulsively.

"My dear Crannock, how could you do such a thing!"

Crannock's face had resumed its habitual expression of bovine imperturbability.

"It seemed the only way to get a decent job done . . . and it's worked the oracle."

"But how can one hope that the people will remain content and self-respecting if their leaders are to bribe their way through life like this? . . . It's putting back the clock to exactly where it was before. . . . It's the absolute negation of all equality."

"There is no equality. There never can be any equality," replied Crannock obstinately.

"Not absolute equality, of course," said Anymoon, more in sorrow than in anger. "But we must try to be as equal as we can. . . . I suppose you do not wish to deny that we have accomplished much?"

"Yes, the State has taken into its own hands *all* the means of production," Crannock intoned ponderously. "Land, mines, and manufactories, and every source of wealth. . . . But surely you don't ask me to believe that this has brought about equality?"

"Of course not, my dear fellow," said Anymoon, beaming upon him. "I know that you don't take me for an impossible idealist. . . . How can one equalise the souls of all mankind?"

"Well, until that is done," replied Crannock sententiously, "you'll have some men giving tips and others taking them. . . . And without meaning any disrespect, old friend, I tell you that you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"You're an incorrigible pessimist," laughed Anymoon.

"I have a practical, legal mind," responded Crannock.

At that moment, a tall, slim, handsome young man, dressed in the conventional black-tailed coat and striped grey trousers used on ceremonious occasions during the old régime, walked into the "Old Presence Chamber" from Queen Anne's Drawing Room. Kenneth Darell by name, he was chief official secretary to the President.

"The Council has assembled, sir," he announced.

"Damn," said Crannock, with features perfectly immobile, "and our conversation was just getting interesting."

Anymoon turned impulsively towards his secretary.

"Look here, Darell, I want to ask you rather a personal question."

Darell inclined his head respectfully.

"I will do my best to answer it," he replied in a clear, cultured voice.

"Tell me, Darell," proceeded Anymoon, "who's your tailor?"

"Grade One, sir—Savile Row."

"Yes, yes, same as mine. . . . And how do you manage to get such well-cut clothes?"

Darell smiled indulgently.

"If they're not right, sir, I send them back."

"And then?"

"If they're still wrong I send them back again."

"And so on and so on, *ad infinitum*?"

"No, sir, they're always right sooner or later."

Anymoon uttered a triumphant crow. "Bravo, Darell! . . . The lad has solved your problem, Crannock. . . . The worker is bound to be efficient if you make him stick to his work till it's right."

"As they do with the school children," answered Crannock sarcastically. "Why not go the whole hog and have payment by results?"

"Piece-work!" retorted Anymoon. "The very antithesis of Communism."

Crannock nodded his head with a quiet smile of acquiescence.

"There must be machinery of some sort," he said, "to replace the old."

"Automatic——"

"Like it used to be."

"Esprit de corps——" began Anymoon, and then checked himself impatiently, as Crannock smiled again. "Dash it all," he added indignantly, "things will work themselves right."

Kenneth Darell, who had been listening attentively to the duologue, now spoke once more.

"When I send them back, Mr. President," he said significantly, "I take care to give the tailor a bit of my mind."

"Excellent!" cried Anymoon, with another crow. "There you have it, Crannock. . . . Discipline. . . . Eurekamen. . . . By Jove, I'll let them see that I can swear too!"

It had been an easy task to carry out the principle that "if a man does not work neither shall he eat," but it was quite another matter to enforce legislation to control the *quality* of the work.

V

As the President, accompanied by his two colleagues, walked into the Council Chamber a few moments later, the members, sitting at the long baize-covered table, rose from their chairs and remained standing in respectful silence until the great man had taken his seat. Crannock sank into the vacant chair next to Anymoon on the right, while Darell sat at his chief's elbow on the left. At a desk at the end of the room three shorthand clerks were waiting to record the proceedings of the meeting.

The most casual observer could not fail to be impressed by the appearance of the councillors—twenty-one men besides Crannock and a woman. The face of each revealed force of character and a high intelligence, for they represented the best intellect that the creators of the new Commonwealth could provide. A squat and wiry man, named Hothersall, with a close-cropped beard and swarthy features, was a typical delegate from the stubborn industrial North, and a long-haired youth, called Phillips, with fresh-coloured cheeks and the yearning eyes of the poet, was one of the deputies for the Commune of the Metropolis. A sombre dwarf of Oriental aspect, keen, hirsute, smouldering, sat in the chair next to Crannock. An elderly man, with a thin hooked nose and a resolute mouth, who had been a peer under the old régime with the title of Earl Thring, faced him on the other side of the table. Mrs. Rhyle, the only woman in the room, was a tall and handsome lady, with refined features and a sweet smile. The majority of the councillors were Scotsmen.

Darell proceeded to read the minutes of the last meeting and the conference began. Business was conducted swiftly and decorously, without any display of passion and without any superfluous digressions. Much of the work was automatic, the delegates merely enunciating the requirements of their particular Communes in brief, clear-cut statements, recited from typescript, the Council voting forthwith either for or against without discussion. Occasionally some high official from the Treasury or the Board of Education was summoned into the room to receive instructions. Various foreign telegrams were read by the Secretary, but they excited little interest, since all the nations were now banded together in a League of Peace, and for the most part they were concerned with details of trade that would be dealt with by individual local authorities.

Anymoon presided over the meeting with masterly skill. The frivolity and boyish exuberance, which in common with so many great statesmen of the past, like Chatham or Pitt or Napoleon, he invariably displayed in private in the companionship of his intimates, had vanished entirely. In the presence of his Council he preserved an air of judicial calm, untainted by any suggestion of prejudice, inspired obviously by the highest sense of duty. His interpolations were always shrewd, swift and to the point. From time to time he seemed to extricate his colleagues from an impending difficulty with a few clear, precise words. His robust eloquence, for he was never at a loss for an adequate expression, had a magnetic effect upon everyone present. And occasionally, with an immobile face, and at an appropriate moment, he uttered a few syllables of rich humour, which caused a murmur of laughter to ripple around the long table. Obviously, he enjoyed both the affection and the respect of the members of the National Council.

"He may be a visionary," reflected the bovine Crannock, sunk deep into his capacious chair, revelling in the aplomb and adroitness of his friend. "But he's certainly a king."

At length, at the end of three hours, the business of

the meeting terminated. Anymoon rose to his feet, his fingers stealing involuntarily to the wart upon his cheek.

"If a delegate wishes to make any remarks," he said, "the Council is ready to listen."

Mrs. Rhyle, the woman Councillor, immediately stood up.

"Mr. President," she began in a low, musical voice, a sweet smile on her lips and a look of diffidence in her eyes, "I wish to speak about the status of some of our women."

Anymoon, always exceptionally gallant to the opposite sex, with whom he was, in consequence, a universal favourite, half rose in his chair and bowed a smiling acquiescence. A Scottish councillor, who was believed to harbour a termagant at home, lowered his chin upon his breast and frowned darkly at the blotting-pad in front of him.

"We have given our women equal wages with our men," Mrs. Rhyle continued earnestly, "and it is just and right that we should have done so."

"Generous, mum, that's what you mean," ejaculated Hothersall, the Lancastrian delegate, unable to contain himself; "there's a mighty difference in their output o' work, let me tell you. . . . There's no equality about that in nine cases out of ten."

Mrs. Rhyle beamed upon her interrupter serenely.

"I agree, Mr. Hothersall," she replied humbly, "and I will substitute the word 'generous.' . . . We have no sympathy, I trust, with the bad old days of economic competition. . . . Our actions are directed by humane motives, not by mathematical formulæ."

"I only wanted to put you right as to facts," said Hothersall triumphantly, scratching his wiry beard, "that's all."

"Mr. Hothersall wishes the ladies to appreciate him at his proper value," remarked Anymoon, with an infectious smile that was caught up by everyone in the room. "He needn't be apprehensive on that score."

"But though our women have equal wages," Mrs.

Rhyle went on, "great numbers of them have not the opportunity of equal happiness. . . . There are two million more women than men in our Commonwealth . . . two million women who cannot find a mate."

"God always favours the big battalions," murmured Mackenzie, the dour Scotsman, fervently.

Mrs. Rhyle, rapt and exalted, still smiling radiantly, was wholly absorbed in the task that she had on hand.

"It is the duty of statecraft to provide equivalent compensations for the poor creatures who are condemned to lead sexless lives," she exclaimed. "The law of Equivalent Compensation should guide this Commonwealth in all things . . . I should like to see it applied in the case of the old and the ailing and the bereaved. . . . The State must act the part of an affectionate parent, overflowing with the milk of human kindness, full of infinite charity."

"I agree," cried a pale, middle-aged man, with small effeminate features, who sat in the seat next to the lady Councillor.

Phillips, of the Metropolitan Commune, leant across the table quickly.

"But what about the two million women?" he demanded, with a marked Cockney accent. "How do you propose to compensate them?"

"That is for the State to decide," answered Mrs. Rhyle quietly. "These women have a great voting power, bear in mind, and they may take matters into their own hands."

Phillips still bent forward, a look of intense interest upon his handsome face.

"Do you mean to advocate polygamy?" he asked slowly.

"And why not?" said Mrs. Rhyle, with a gleam of enthusiasm in her kind eyes. "You have destroyed monopolies in land and property. . . . How can you defend the monopoly that you allow a woman to have in a man?"

"Because the majority of women prefer such an arrangement," observed Anymoon promptly.

Mrs. Rhyle smiled back at him triumphantly.

"You, at least, should know, Mr. President," she replied, with a modest laugh, "that every innovation is brought about by a resolute minority."

"Stuff and rubbish!" cried the mercurial Hothersall, aghast. "Why, if we had polygamy the State would be littered up wi' children."

"The whole question of the reproduction of the species in its relation both to men and women ought to be considered in all its bearings," said Mrs. Rhyle, "and so, Mr. President, I beg leave to move that a select committee of this Council be appointed to collect evidence and present an exhaustive report."

Anymoon inclined his head.

"The matter shall come up at our next meeting," he answered sympathetically. "If you will bring forward your motion then, my dear lady, I have no doubt that it will be carried into effect."

"Will the Secretary please put down my name as the seconder of the motion?" remarked the pale delegate, Sternroyd by name.

For some time the sombre little man beside Crannock—of Jewish blood unmistakably—had been combing his straggling black beard with his thin fingers and fidgeting in his chair restlessly. As soon as the resolution of Mrs. Rhyle had been recorded in the minutes he sprang to his feet.

"Our lady has said that we have destroyed monopolies," he burst forth, with blazing eyes; "she spoke without reflection. . . . There are thousands of monopolists."

"You mean the *rentiers*?" observed Anymoon complacently, while Thring, the ex-peer, began to gnaw his nails nervously.

"I mean the swarms of people who are permitted to draw an income from the State merely because they were capitalists previously," cried the Jew wrathfully.

Rising quickly, Anymoon, with an imperious wave of the hand, motioned to the impassioned speaker to resume his seat.

"Pardon me, Mr. Cohen," he said calmly, "but I must interpose. . . . In constructing our new Commonwealth we have been guided throughout by expediency and humanitarianism. . . . It was neither expedient nor humane to exterminate the *rentier* immediately. . . . We were obliged to make allowances in respect of the present generation."

"We must blot out capitalism absolutely," persisted Cohen.

"The result you desire will come about automatically," replied Anymoon. "Under the present economic structure of society the capitalist does not exist. . . . The *rentier* has merely a terminable interest in an annuity granted by Government. It represents only twenty per cent of his previous income. The State is richer by the other four-fifths. With the passing away of the present generation inheritance will cease and the Commonwealth will come into its own absolutely."

"That's plain as a pikestaff to anybody," remarked Hothersall. "There's nowt to worry about."

"The people want the *rentier* to be squashed now," retorted Cohen.

"The people are quite content if agitators will let them alone," observed Anymoon firmly. "For the present the *rentier* is a necessary evil. . . . With his bad traditions it was impossible to convert him into the ideal citizen at once. . . . He is a drone, I admit, but the State was bound to support him."

"Not in idle luxury," observed Mrs. Rhyle.

"That is a mere figure of rhetoric, my dear lady," said Anymoon, beaming upon her. "We have secured equal justice and equal opportunity for everyone, while preserving that most essential condition—infinite variety. You do not desire a soul-clogging uniformity."

"Excuse me, Mr. President," retorted Mrs. Rhyle, who had a logical mind, "but you are merely begging the question."

"The ex-millionaire gets a pension of ten thousand a year," cried Cohen, clawing at his beard. "The man who

had a hundred thousand pounds gets an income of a thousand. . . . It's iniquitous."

"It will all come right in time," said Phillips. "Let well alone. . . . I agree with the President."

"The whole country is seething with indignation," exclaimed Cohen. "We're heading straight for a revolution."

"I think the country has had enough of revolution," said Thring, with a shudder.

"It's what everybody's talking about," replied Cohen.

"David said in his haste, 'all men are liars,'" interjected Hothersall.

"He might have taken his time about it," remarked Anymoon, amidst a general titter. "Well, Mr. Cohen, in deference to me I hope that you will not insist upon bringing forward your resolution."

The Jew made no audible response, but from the scowl upon his dark face it was plain that there was rebellion in his heart.

"Pinchbeck Cromwell," he muttered into his beard.

VI

HALF an hour later, Anymoon was sitting in the President's private apartments, *tête-à-tête* with his wife, enjoying a cup of tea. The prime of life, for she was now forty, had enhanced both the placidity and the plumpness of Mrs. Anymoon inordinately. She lay back in a well-cushioned arm-chair, cosy and comfortable, robed in a loose flowing garment, which in former days had been appropriately styled "Liberty," with a book in her lap, munching hot buttered toast. On the other side of the tea-table, with his feet on the fender, Anymoon was popping dessert biscuits into his mouth industriously.

"What's that you're reading?" he inquired at length.

Mrs. Anymoon stifled a lazy yawn.

"One of your Commonwealth poets," she answered in a rich, luxurious voice, which suggested, in a minor key, the diapason of the church organ.

"Well, what's he got to say about things?" he inquired casually.

"His mental attitude is refreshing, like that of every poet, when he's young," she said, with half-closed eyes looking down at her lap, "and, of course, it's rebellious. . . . While the late Victorian school pursued the ideal and the Edwardians were wholly absorbed by what was *known*, the Georgians went in search of the *unknown*. . . . Now, your Commonwealth poets appear to take an interest in nothing that is not unattainable."

"Is there anything in life that is not attainable?" demanded Anymoon combatively.

She raised her calm white face from her book, and her full red lips parted with a smile.

"Immortality . . . a visit to the stars . . . perfect peace of mind."

"Bah! we may accomplish them all," said Anymoon impatiently.

"And they would have no value then because other things would still be unattainable. . . . Life is, and always has been, a state of unrest."

"Men are restless, like the poet you're reading, because they are seeking happiness."

"So they delude themselves, but their restlessness is an essential condition—the anodyne bestowed by nature. . . . It is not a means to an end, but the end itself."

"Then we are mere machines, running without weight?"

"The machine has to run in order that it shall not rust."

"So you think men are like bees buzzing in a bottle," snorted Anymoon contemptuously.

Mrs. Anymoon's calm grey eyes rested for a moment upon her husband compassionately.

"We are just as futile . . . our organism compels us to buzz."

Anymoon struck his fist into his palm, a characteristic gesture of his.

"Do you mean to imply our sole means of happiness depends upon a condition of fever?"

"Nature offers an alternative anodyne," she answered, with a yawn; "but mankind will never be wise enough to accept it."

"And that is?"

"Ignorance."

"Like that of the animal?"

"The life of the beast, when controlled by the beneficent power of man, is the only example of perfect happiness in the world."

Anymoon jumped to his feet, overturning his tea-cup.

"Yes," he cried excitedly. "If man would only allow a beneficent force to control *his* destiny . . . if he would cease to try to think for himself."

"Perhaps evolution may accomplish that. . . . The divinity may at last arise."

"It must and shall," cried Anymoon, in one of his bursts of egotism, "otherwise there will be nothing but chaos and strife."

The sagacious Mrs. Anymoon smiled cynically.

"I do not believe that the controlling deity will take the shape of a separate entity," she observed, with her hands in her lap. "I think it will come in the form of a new instinct, or, to use the jargon of the old reactionaries, in an entire transformation of human nature."

"Bah!" cried Anymoon, shuddering at the hated words.

"The bee is a futile rebel in the bottle, but he has accomplished his true environment when in the hive. . . . His happiness is not the negative result of his toils, but is bestowed upon him by his instinct, which has given him the anodyne of ignorance. . . . He does not seek happiness. He has found it."

Anymoon gave a gesture of despair.

"The bee-hive," he growled, "is that what evolution holds out for us?"

"Nature never stops half-way," said his wife.

Anymoon began to pace up and down the room with a puzzled face.

"We must go on and on interminably, it seems," he cried wearily. "In spite of this great upheaval we have accomplished nothing. . . . We appear to be only at the beginning."

"The real changes have yet to come," she answered dreamily.

"Everything is in the melting-pot. . . . On all sides there is unrest . . . we must run before the wind or perish in the storm. . . . And yet I was hopeful that we should enjoy a period of calm. . . . That fellow Cohen is right. . . . The nation is seething with discontent."

"There can be no stagnation," she replied regretfully.

"The *rentier* will have to go," he said gloomily, throwing himself into his chair again, "that is clear. . . . But it will cause an upset. . . . It would have been better to employ natural means rather than a surgical operation."

She stretched forth her arm and laid her fingers upon his hand sympathetically.

"You are fighting a hard battle."

"We live in stormy times."

"Oh, cursed spite," she murmured, with a frown, "that ever you were born to set things right."

"You have no faith in me," he said reproachfully.

"I have no faith," she answered, "in the recuperative power of your patient."

Although she was one of the most sympathetic of wives, Anymoon always felt least optimistic when he listened to her. But as the fierce light that beats upon a contemporary throne—unlike the fierce light that is cast upon it subsequently by history—does not reveal the secret imaginings of its occupant, Anymoon was regarded by the whole world as one of the most steadfast and confident of mankind.

VII

Kenneth Darell, who was the last to leave the Council Chamber when the meeting was over, found Thring, the ex-peer, waiting for him at the top of the wide staircase.

"Come home to tea, Kenneth," he remarked; "Grace asked me to bring you."

He spoke of an orphan niece, who kept house for him, and the young man, affianced to her for many months, accepted the invitation with a glad smile.

Darell was a typical specimen of the brainy and robust Englishman of the ruling class under the old régime. Sprung from a long line of country gentlemen who had held their territory almost since the Conquest, he had been head of the school at Winchester and captain of the cricket Eleven. At Oxford he had taken a first in Lit. Hum., and had been a double Blue. Although he had been at the Bar only for three years when the Great War broke out, he had shown already that he was capable of achieving aught that his ambition might covet. Throwing up his profession as soon as the Germans had crossed the Belgian frontier, he had secured a commission in a Guards regiment, rising from subaltern to lieutenant-colonel and being twice wounded during the course of the next three years. After the conclusion of peace he had become a Member of Parliament, and in spite of the fact that he had opposed the proposals of Anymoon in a series of speeches that revealed him as one of the most resourceful orators in the House of Commons, it had been impossible to overlook his claims when the new Constitution was established. No one was surprised when the most brilliant young man of his year was selected for the post of chief secretary to the President. Seeing that it was useless to fight against the inevitable, Darell had accepted the office, adapting himself to the new order of

things with resignation and devoting himself to the services of the Commonwealth loyally. In appearance he was dark and of a fresh complexion, with a small black moustache.

"The President was in good form to-day," observed Thring, as he led the way down the stairs.

Always a man of the most advanced opinions in spite of his rank, and a militant Socialist long before the war, the ex-peer had been one of Anymoon's devoted supporters throughout the Great Upheaval.

Darell was silent for a moment, a look of hesitation depicted upon his refined, clear-cut features.

"Yes," he said at length, with an expression of assent in his dark eyes, "with all his limitations he is a great man."

Thring drew his fingers down his hooked nose savagely.

"That hairy little dwarf is an outrageous marplot," he went on; "these fire-brands will be the ruin of us. . . . Take my own case. . . . My rent-roll used to be over a hundred thousand and I am left with ten. . . . Cyril will inherit only a fourth of that, and his children get nothing. . . . We must broaden down slowly from precedent to precedent. . . . To put everyone on a dead level would be to fulfil the predictions of our opponents."

"Such is the logical conclusion," retorted Darell emphatically.

"There can never be uniformity," said Thring, with a sneer; "whatever happens, men of exceptional ability must receive exceptional recognition . . . *ergo* there will always be a privileged class."

"But Cohen and those who think with him contend that the exceptional recognition received by this privileged class should not take the form of filthy lucre," answered Darell. "They suggest that the prestige of leadership and the admiration of one's fellow-men should be sufficient reward."

"Then they must set about creating a new heaven as well as a new earth," snapped Thring, frowning.

"I think they mean to have a jolly good try," said Darell smilingly.

A Rolls-Royce landaulette was standing in front of the Palace gateway when the two men came out into the road. A footman in livery held open the door.

"Home," said Thring, as he followed his companion inside, and the car set off up St. James's Street.

In its general aspect London had altered little and yet there was an unmistakable change. It manifested itself especially in the appearance of the shop windows, which displayed a cheaper and much less choice class of goods than formerly. There were many more jewellers than in the old days, for with the advance in wages the demand for trinkets had increased, but the confiscation of so much wealth had caused a decline in the value of precious stones, and the commonest types of Birmingham goods were ablaze with pearls and diamonds. A huge tailoring establishment for men in the middle of St. James's Street exhibited a heterogeneous collection of ready-made suits. The shops in Piccadilly—now all Government emporiums of considerable size—were devoted for the most part to the sale of tobacco and cigarettes, stationery and picture-postcards; or were spacious tea-shops after the style of Lyons's in former days. Most of the dry-goods stores, larger now and far more numerous, were situated as before in Regent Street and Oxford Street. Burlington House, which was the home of the Academy of the Commonwealth, had just opened its annual exhibition of paintings, but a great Cinema theatre, which occupied the site of the old Arcade, seemed—judging from the crowds that were passing therein as Thring's motor-car reached the top of St. James's Street—to be receiving a much larger share of public patronage.

But the greatest transformation of all had taken place in the appearance of the people themselves. There was a far more complete uniformity in the style of dress. Every woman was sumptuously arrayed; every man had a brand-new suit and a clean collar. Save for the obvious self-consciousness and rigidity with which the great

majority carried themselves, they resembled a typical crowd of the better classes in Victorian times. A leisurely inspection, however, revealed another change. Courtesy in manners had almost entirely vanished. People pushed and jostled against one another on the side-walk, passing along without a look or a gesture of regret. Frequently, a well-dressed youth would shout a few bitter words of execration at another of his kind who had bumped against the girl at his side. Numbers scuttled along on roller-skates or scooters. Still, there were a few men and women who appeared less aggressive and were dressed in a quieter style, conspicuous also for the way in which they wore their clothes.

There was much more uniformity also in the character of the vehicles in the streets. The public omnibuses now resembled private cars, with painted and varnished panels, undisfigured by the garish advertisements which they used to display. The public taxi-cabs were of the same type, spruce and well-appointed as the landaulettes of the "idle rich" of former days. Only a few private cars seemed to have survived and these all bore a distinctive plate on the front of the bonnet. The traffic was controlled by an efficient body of police, dressed in smart grey uniforms. At every street corner a boot-black in State livery, and within a little kiosk emblazoned with the arms of the Commonwealth, was doing a brisk trade. Menial work of every description had been made as dignified as possible.

A block of vehicles at the corner of Berkeley Street held up the traffic for a few moments as Thring's motor-car swept down Piccadilly. Two flashily-dressed girls, accompanied by a youth with a Homburg hat thrust at the back of his head and a variegated waistcoat, were standing on the kerbstone.

"Toffs!" sneered one of them stridently, with a contemptuous toss of her feathers.

The young man thrust a vindictive face towards the window of the car.

"Make the most of your time, old cock," he said,

addressing Thring. "It's got to be share and share alike all round. . . . And to hell with favouritism!"

Thring leant back in his seat, with an angry compression of his nostrils, looking like a fierce old eagle.

"The greatest problem of the age is the maintenance of discipline," he ejaculated.

"The desire for freedom," remarked Darell, "or rather for unlimited licence, is one of the oldest primitive instincts of mankind."

"So is the instinct of murder," scoffed Thring.

"Likewise the outcome of the seeking after security. . . . Man is a fighting, quarrelling animal because what he does not get for himself he must go without."

"And when shall we have peace?"

"When there is no reason to fight any more."

The car turned up Berkeley Street, past the site of Devonshire House, where a great block of flats was under course of construction, and along the wall of Lansdowne House, which had been converted recently into a National crèche. Most of the residences in the square were occupied now by members of the Government or by the higher officials. Cohen and Crannock lived in two of the largest of them. A frown gathered again upon Thring's face as they flashed by the front door of the former.

Passing through Davies Street, the car turned into Grosvenor Street and finally came to a halt before one of the most spacious mansions in Grosvenor Square. A small De Dion, without occupants, was drawn up in front of it.

"Cyril's run-about," said Thring, with a smile of satisfaction, as he stepped out of his car. "I'm glad you've found him at home."

A stalwart butler, in the prime of life and of soldierly bearing, opened the hall door.

"Miss Dalrymple wished me to say that tea is served in the morning-room, m'lord—I mean, sir," he announced. "Mr. Cyril and Miss Sterling are with her."

"I wish you would remember not to call me my lord, Parker," said Thring reproachfully. "It's against the law, you know."

VIII

A PARTY of three were sitting around the tea-table when Thring and Darell entered the room, a spacious apartment, filled with precious bric-à-brac and antique furniture.

"Hello, dad," said Cyril Thring, with a whoop of welcome. "Has the Council been as footling as usual this afternoon?"

He was a large and rosy youth, with flaxen hair that had a kink in it. In the Household Cavalry before the war, he was now an inspector of factories—a post that he owed to his father's influence—in the north of England.

"Hush, Cyril," cried a pretty girl, sitting beside him. "If you don't take care they'll execute you on Tower Hill."

"No fear, Betty," he answered, giving her a playful pat on the arm. "None of them have guts enough to use an axe."

"But they might send for a guillotine from Paris," Betty Sterling persisted, with a little *moue* of mock dismay.

Grace Dalrymple, tall and fair and radiant, had risen to greet her fiancé, a tender light in her hazel eyes. The only daughter of Thring's elder brother, who had preceded him in the earldom, she too had dropped her courtesy title with the advent of the new order of things.

"You look tired, Kenneth," she said, making room for him on the sofa beside her. "I know you've been worked to death, as we've seen nothing of you for a week."

"Yes," answered Darell, with an affectionate smile, "that shows that I haven't had a moment to spare."

"It's a wonder he's not bald and grey and heartbroken," grumbled Thring. "Cyril understates the position. . . . The Council is suffering from General Paralysis of the Insane."

"I wished you'd diagnosed the malady a few years ago,

dad," his son answered. "Then you might have helped to prevent the blighters from making such an infernal muck of things."

"Cyril," said Betty Sterling admonishingly, "I can see that you're going to end your days in jail."

"A man must go with the tide," observed the elder Thring exculpatorily, "or he gets stranded."

"That's preferable to shipwreck at all events," retorted Cyril. "You've lived your life, dad, and unless rumour libels you, it's been a life. . . . But mine's in front of me, and it's jolly hard lines, owing to this damned Socialism, that I can't have your chances."

Thring took the cup of tea that his niece handed to him and raised it to his lips hastily to conceal a self-conscious smile.

"What d'you mean, Cyril?" Betty, who was engaged to him, demanded tartly. "Your ambition is running away with you, my dear."

"It's not only been girls with dad, my angel," said Cyril. "He's had a hell of a time apart from them. . . . That's all I was thinking of."

"You may come in for more than you bargain," observed Thring darkly. "Mrs. Rhyle has been hinting that a man may be compelled to take more than one w fe."

"If ever I have a colleague," said Betty slowly, with a glance at Cyril from beneath her dark lashes, "she'll be very sorry for herself for butting in."

"How long are you in town, Cyril?" inquired Darell. "Is there any chance of your being able to dine with me?"

"Alas, no, old sport," answered the younger Thring dolefully. "My leave's up. . . . I'm off to the grimy North to-morrow by the midnight train."

"Night journeys are simply awful now that we've only got these public sleeping-cars," said Betty, with a shudder. "Oh, the snoring! . . . And the last time I travelled an old woman in the top bunk trod upon my face."

"Vandal!" observed Cyril compassionately.

"Perhaps we shall be all the better for less luxury,"

said Grace hopefully. "We must be content with the simple life."

"That's what fools were yapping for before the war," replied the reactionary Betty. "It means fleas and dirty tablecloths and nobody to maid one."

"And anything that's sloppy and slovenly," sighed Thring, passing his cup for some more tea.

"You've been an exemplary parent to me, dad," observed Cyril, "but I'll be hanged if you're a good Socialist."

"Nonsense," retorted Thring irritably. "I've been a stalwart from the first. . . . But I believe in discipline. . . . A place for every man and every man in his place."

"The motto of Richard Oastler and the old Tories," remarked Darell reflectively.

"Yes, if they'd had their way we shouldn't all be in the soup now," added Cyril.

Darell glanced at his friend keenly.

"You mean that the factory system has fulfilled its inevitable evolution?" he remarked.

"I mean that we created an infernal monster, like Frankenstein," said the other contemptuously, "and he has eaten us up."

"At any rate," observed Betty, with a ripple of laughter, "when they abolished titles it was a perfect scream. . . . My poor old daddy mourned for his 'Wait-and-See' Barony as if he had lost a faithful wife. . . . It was a case of he never smiled again."

"I didn't like it either," said Darell, with a mischievous chuckle. "I was somebody in the old days. . . . As I walked down the street I've often heard folks whisper 'That's Mr. Darell.' Mister! . . . I was almost unique."

"Of course the thing was horribly overdone by the Radicals," growled Thring. "They should never have made a man a peer unless his table manners were all right. . . . That would have kept the numbers within limits."

"Or if his H's were groggy," added Cyril, smoothing his curly hair. "I dare say you noticed how few of the Georgian titles began with the eighth letter of the alphabet."

Thring drank up his cup of tea and rose to his feet abruptly.

"I must go and write my report for the Commune," he observed gloomily. "It's a two hours' job at least."

"And I'm going to take Betty a spin round the Parks," Cyril announced, rising also. "I don't suppose that Grace and Kenneth will bear us a lasting grudge for leaving them alone."

"No, we want to have a serious talk together," said Grace calmly.

"Don't forget to ring for Parker to clear away the tea-things first," cried Betty, with a wicked twinkle in her eyes.

"Look here, why shouldn't we all dine together and go to see a show?" said Cyril, with a sudden impulse. "It's my last night in town for a blue moon."

Thring paused as he was going out of the door.

"If you don't mind having an old man with you," he interrupted, with pathetic eagerness, "I'll take you young people to the Carlton and get a box afterwards at any theatre you like."

"Content upon my honour," exclaimed Cyril. "Let's go to the Empire. . . . It's sure to be blithering rot, but it'll be no more deadly than anywhere else."

"They say it's a very good Revue," said Grace.

"What's the name of it?"

"*Democracy.*"

"My Aunt!" said Cyril irritably. "There's nothing else for breakfast, lunch and dinner. . . . And we have to take it to bed with us too."

IX

THE conversation of Grace and Kenneth proved to be far more serious than the young man had anticipated, for his fiancée confessed to him, as soon as they were alone, that she wished their marriage, which was to have taken place at the end of June, to be postponed indefinitely. Although she assured him that her feelings towards him were unchanged she declared positively that, for the present at all events, she could not become his wife. There were tears in her eyes as she made her confession and her voice trembled, but she seemed firm in her resolve.

"I feel that the times are too unstable for you to burden your life with me," she said at the end of her avowal, to which he had listened in silence with immobile features. "I do not think that it would be right for us to be married now."

He took her hand within his own and caressed it gently. His smooth, fresh-coloured cheeks and delicately-shaped nostrils gave him a more youthful appearance than most men of thirty years. There was a look of infinite patience in his glance as he bent over her.

"I can realise, dearest, why you are uncertain," he said sympathetically, drawing her towards him. "It is true that we do not know what a day may bring forth. . . . Still, I think you magnify our difficulties."

She flung herself upon his breast, and, with her arms around his neck, raised her sad, earnest face imploring to his. It was a soulful face, calm and benign, and there was a light in her eyes such as is always seen in those of a good mother.

"Don't think that I do not love you, dear one," she murmured. "There was never any doubt in my heart and there never will be. . . . There can be no other man for me, Kenneth, but you."

"I know that, my darling," he said, stooping to kiss her upturned lips.

"You must not think I am selfish," she continued, nestling in his arms. "I'm not afraid of poverty . . . it's not that."

He gave a short, eager laugh as he smoothed her fair hair.

"With our combined salaries I do not think we should be poor," he replied; "even when they confiscate our *rentes* I believe they will need you and me always at the top."

She smiled at his egotism.

"For a little while, perhaps," she went on earnestly. "But not, I think, for very long. . . . There are going to be changes, Kenneth, changes that none of us can foresee."

He gave another short laugh, but this time there was a bitter ring in it.

"Yes, so far we have had only an upheaval. . . . The earthquake has yet to come. . . . Still, I don't intend to allow myself to be engulfed."

"Ah, you agree that there will be an earthquake?"

"Sooner perhaps than anyone believes."

"I think it is coming now—at once. Everything points that way."

Grace Dalrymple, now in her twenty-fourth year, was a girl of much strength of character. Believing that every woman ought to have a profession, or at all events that she should be capable of some productive work, she had devoted herself to the study of art in Paris and in Rome on the death of her father seven years previously, though possessed of adequate means; and being gifted with unmistakable talent she soon gave promise of becoming a fine portrait painter. At the time of the Great Upheaval, in spite of her youth, she had already made a reputation for herself—exhibiting one of the most remarkable pictures of the year in the Royal Academy. In view of the new order of things this was a lucky circumstance. It enabled her uncle to use his influence

to nominate her for a seat on the National Committee of Art, which, as her candidature received the support of the women's party, she was successful in obtaining. So, unlike many other equally capable but less fortunate artists, she did not fall into oblivion through lack of patronage, and her strong sense of duty was appeased by the knowledge that she was engaged in useful work.

In spite of her talents she was wholly feminine in temperament, taking pleasure in dress and devoted to children, shrinking from publicity and fond of her home. Devoutly religious, although by no means a bigot, she had been received into the Catholic Church during her residence in Rome, for her artistic nature had been captivated by the music and the pageantry and the mysticism of the ancient faith. She was no dreamer of dreams, however, but shrewd and practical, a vigorous, athletic girl, who played tennis superbly, and, in former days, had been a fearless rider to hounds.

"Whatever may be in store for us, dearest," Darell whispered earnestly, "we shall be better able to meet misfortune if we face it side by side."

There was a golden gleam of rapture in her hazel eyes.

"Yes," she murmured, "it would be sweeter far for me."

A flush rose into his cheeks.

"Then why not trust me?"

"Trust you! . . . I have infinite trust in you. . . . It is myself that I do not trust."

"You cannot think, whatever happens, that we shall be unhappy?"

She sighed wearily.

"I do not think that it is right that we should be happy in such a way."

He folded her in his arms once more, passionately, raining kisses upon her upraised lips, as though he sought to tame her into sensibility.

"You are morbid, dear one. . . . I do not understand."

She drew away from him gently.

"I think you ought to understand," she said in a low voice. "Marriage is the most holy of sacraments."

"And to you and me it would mean perfect happiness."

"Yes, indeed . . . if we had only ourselves to consider, but there are other things."

There was a glimmer of perplexity in his dark eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

She lowered her head.

"Our points of view are different," she persisted sorrowfully.

"Grace!" he cried, in expostulation.

"I am a Catholic," she answered humbly.

His gaze wandered covetously over her graceful form and he sought to draw her towards him again, but she checked him.

"I look upon marriage as my Church does," she continued solemnly.

He regarded her for a moment, dumb and wondering, an expression almost of awe in his face, and then he inclined his head.

"I think I understand," he said reverently, and he knew that nothing could shake her resolve.

The blood flamed into her cheeks hotly and her eyes were downcast. For a while he was silent, melancholy and brooding, and then presently once more he was full of hope and eagerness.

"But your scruples will very soon be baseless," he cried, in the flood-tide of a new optimism. "There will be peace and goodwill amongst all mankind."

"When that time comes you will find me ready," she answered fondly. "I shall need no persuasion when my way seems clear."

He laid his lips upon her brow compassionately. His disappointment was a bitter one, but her word was law to him.

"Our happiness cannot be postponed for long. . . . I do not feel the same as you, dearest, naturally, but I know what your faith is to you and I realise your difficulties. . . . I will wait in patience."

She rested her cheek upon her hand, her eyes downcast still.

"If it was merely something that concerned you and me! . . . But marriage would mean much more than that. . . . Oh, forgive me, Kenneth, but in these stormy days I do not think it would be right."

"But you will wait for me? . . . You can promise that."

"For ever."

He kissed her, with a gay laugh.

"A few months will be enough. . . . Before then the deluge will have passed us by, or we shall have been overwhelmed."

He placed his hands on both her shoulders, looking down upon her pleadingly.

"And in the meantime while we are waiting, and we must wait hopefully, we can go on just the same . . . we shall be as good friends as ever."

"Not friends, Kenneth," she cried, holding out her arms to him. "Lovers! . . . If you think," she added, with a plaintive sigh, "that I am worth waiting for."

But in spite of her hopeful words there was little hope in her heart.

X

When Betty Sterling returned from her motor drive with Cyril she found Grace sitting alone in the morning-room, grave and musing.

"I'm just off home to dress," she cried, with sparkling eyes. "But I had to run in, darling, to tell you the great news. . . . Cyril and I have decided to be married the same day as you and Kenneth. . . . We'll have a double wedding."

Grace raised her head slowly, with a sad smile.

"Of course, we shall be very poor," Betty babbled on, an animated little figure on the threshold of the doorway,

with a grey dust-coat over her white summer frock,—"but everyone's in the same boat nowadays. . . . Cyril's going to get me made manager of a store in the North, for he can't give up his job in Lancashire."

"Close the door, Betty," said Grace gently. "I want to talk to you."

Betty did as she was told, and tripping across to her friend, flung herself beside her on to the settee with a flourish of white silk stockings.

"Well, what's the discourse?" she demanded.

"Kenneth and I are not to be married at present," answered Grace, after a short pause.

Betty gave a convulsive little plunge, and her large brown eyes shone with dismay.

"My darling," she exclaimed, aghast, "whatever for?"

Grace hesitated for a moment before she replied.

"With marriage," she said at length, solemnly, "there are children."

Betty's lashes flickered spasmodically, and her cheeks grew crimson.

"Of course," she answered, with a pout of defiance. "I intend to have two or three."

Grace bowed her head in acquiescence.

"And I do not wish to have any," she said in a low voice.

Betty gave a mischievous laugh.

"Oh, but you can please yourself," she replied, glancing at her friend from under her lashes. "Many people——"

"I think that is very wrong," said Grace emphatically.

"It's different for you, I know, darling," said Betty, with sudden solemnity, sidling towards her. "Your priest would want to know the why and the wherefore. . . . But still he can't make you do what you don't want."

"You don't know what I mean, Betty," answered Grace earnestly.

"Do let me cuddle up close," continued Betty coaxingly, "and tell me all about it. . . . I just adore babies, but I

wish they weren't such an expense. . . . Surely if you tell your priest he will understand."

"It's not that, dear. I'm not so selfish as that. . . . I realise that people in our class are going to have a harder time when they marry . . . that they will have to do without nursemaids and look after their children themselves."

"Or, if they can't," said Betty, with a shudder, "put them in a National crèche . . . you won't find me doing that!"

Grace took her friend's hand in her strong, resolute grasp.

"One may be compelled. . . . The Government must interfere more and more with the concerns of family life. . . . Individual liberty must give way to the authority of the State."

"But they have decided not to meddle with religion. . . . One can be married in church and teach one's children any creed one likes."

"Yes, at present. . . . If I believed that things would endure as they are now, or with trifling modifications, my way would be clear."

"Oh, Grace," cried Betty in a burst of dismay, "you'll make me wish I never had been born."

"It's what I fear is coming that alarms me—strife, anarchism and a nation that is absolutely pagan. . . . That is why I do not wish to bring children into the world."

"My dear," said the horrified Betty, "if everyone thought like you the population would go spark out."

"My conscience will not allow me to marry and remain childless," continued Grace, with a sigh, "therefore I cannot marry."

"Well, I think it is perfectly horrid of you," retorted Betty. "Whatever happens I mean to have one, at least."

"It's different for you, dear," said Grace, smiling.

"And I've no patience with your old priest," snapped Betty, "you can tell him so if you like."

"Father Oldfield is far more hopeful than I am," continued Grace. "He looks forward to an age of universal brotherhood in which the Church will possess the allegiance of all mankind. . . . When religion will be the rule of life, not a casual incident in it."

"The poor old visionary!" cried Betty.

"Why, dear? . . . Socialism and Christianity should mean the same thing. . . . Our Lord's teaching has prescribed the ideal state. . . . The Sermon on the Mount ought to be our Magna Carta."

"If that's what you're going to wait for," said Betty scornfully, "you're booked all right for an old maid."

"I confess that I am of little faith," Grace continued sadly. "But it is a noble ideal. . . . I wish that I could believe that it will come to pass. . . . I trust that Father Oldfield will prove to be a true prophet."

"Prophets are tiresome frauds," said Betty cynically. "What they say is going to happen is what they want to happen, always, my dear."

She raised her hands to the brim of her saucy hat impatiently, giving it a vicious tilt, and brushed her fingers over her temples to smooth away the wisps of brown hair. Grace sat in silence, her kind eyes lost in reverie, while a shadow seemed to flutter around the corners of her full red lips.

"You take life too seriously, my dear," Betty continued at length, with a little crease between her arched brows. "Why not live a day at a time? It's much more comfortable."

"But life is a serious thing," said Grace, smiling.

"It's what folks make it," replied Betty severely. "And one can only live it once—Socialism or no Socialism . . . damn Socialism!"

"I wish we could, my dear."

Betty's bright brown eyes flashed a wistful glance into her friend's face.

"I hope Kenneth is coming to-night," she observed anxiously. "I expect you've thrown him into the deepest depths of despair, you wicked girl."

"Of course he is coming," replied Grace serenely. "Like you, dear, he is an optimist. . . . He believes that better days are in store for us."

"What a nice man!"

"We shall be the same to each other still. . . . Kenneth is patient and he is content to wait."

Betty tossed up her chin disdainfully.

"I think," she said, with a pout, "that you're perfectly horrid to him."

Grace inclined her head sadly.

"And all this fuss about a baby," continued Betty, with another toss, "as if one would make any difference."

She sprang up from the couch and snatching off her dust-cloak, stood for an instant, cool and dainty in her white cloth coat and skirt, gazing down at her friend quizzically.

"You look prettier than ever, my dear," she observed reproachfully. "And put on that new green frock to-night, bear in mind. . . . It's your colour absolutely. . . . I shall have to wear my cream chiffon again, worse luck. . . . It's about the only decent thing I've got. . . . Oh, damn Socialism!"

XI

Downstairs in the basement at that precise moment some humbler members of society were occupied in "damning" Socialism as vehemently as Betty Sterling. Around the tea-table in the servants' hall a little group, consisting of the cook, Parker the butler, Grace's maid, the footman and the upper housemaid, was sitting in colloquy, discussing the affairs of the nation with characteristic abandon.

"He said I weren't to call him my lord," remarked Parker, with a scornful laugh, "and he's right, for it's against the law. . . . There'll be a law in a bit to prevent the boy and the scullery-maid from calling me Mister."

The cook giggled derisively.

"Let me catch either of them using my Christian name," she said menacingly. "That's all."

"I'm just about fed up with things," exclaimed the lady's maid. "No foreign travel, nor no country-house visits to speak of, and scarcely a gentleman left in the servants' hall."

"Oh, come, Miss Reynolds," expostulated the footman, "it ain't quite as bad as that . . . though I allow things is pared down pretty fine. . . . Fancy me having to take on a valet's job as well as my own, and at my time of life."

"I get my five quid a week," said Parker, frowning dismally, "which with board and lodging and my clothes works out close on a pound a day—Government wage. And I need only be on duty eight hours in the twenty-four. . . . But I tell you honestly, I'm no better off than I was in the old times. . . . I've figured it out and there's not ten bob in it."

"Yes," observed the housemaid sympathetically, "the tips made all the difference."

"There's more to grumble at than that," said the cook. "My poor old stepfather, who brought me up, put the savings of his life, which was two thousand pounds or thereabouts, into cottage property. . . . They only allow him five per cent on the first thousand and he gets but a fifth of the interest on the second . . . but when it comes to me, as I know it will, the Government 'll collar three-fourths of the lot."

"They say we didn't ought to save," answered the lady's maid, "and that suits my book right enough."

"My old father's well-nigh broken-hearted," continued Parker. "He was born and bred on the estate and he's served his lordship's family for forty years. . . . But they've scrapped all the gamekeepers, so he's been put in as caretaker at the Castle to show the public round the place. . . . Fancy Thring Park as a national museum! . . . It's like turning a cathedral into a music-hall."

"We'll all be losing our places in a bit," said the cook gloomily.

"Yes," added Parker, "I was reading one of Cohen's speeches last week. He'd the cheek to say we were an unproductive class—called us idle parasites."

. . . . . .

There were others, however, whose point of view in regard to the existing order of things was entirely different, though even still more hostile. On the same evening half a dozen men of the artisan class were sitting around the fire-place in the public dining-room of a cheap and spacious lodging-house in Deptford. Large blocks of service apartments, where the working-man could obtain parlour and bedrooms for himself and family and have his meals served from a common kitchen, had sprung up like mushrooms in all the large towns, taking the place of thousands of small cottages. In consequence of social reform it was inevitable that the Continental system of flat life should become more universal all over England as time went on, effecting a complete change in the domestic habits of the people. The huge bee-hives were multiplying fast, while the little nests were being gradually swept away.

A fire was smouldering in the grate, and the six men were conversing over their pipes after the day's toil.

"We've not made a bad start, mates, the last two years," said a small man, with pale, sunken cheeks and a mass of tow-like hair, a gleam of enthusiasm in his weary blue eyes. "Labour is coming into its own. . . . Naught can stop it."

"Except we go to sleep again," rejoined a burly veteran on the other side of the hearth, "as we've always done in the past, Kinreck."

"We're wake enough now," replied the pale man earnestly. "Half of the pulling-down is done already and we'll make an end of the job this time, I reckon."

"I'm sick of talk," cried a tall youth, with a bitter smile and fierce, revengeful eyes. "There's thousands of

idle rich among us still. . . . And to hell with 'em all, say I."

Kinreck took his pipe from his lips, spitting into the grate contemptuously.

"If it's a case for hell, I'd make it a hell on earth for them," he said vindictively. "I'd punish them with hard labour as a return for all we've suffered by them in the past."

"Nay, nay, lads," protested a well-dressed man, with kindly, intelligent features, "we must all live as brothers if society is to endure. . . . There can be no reprisals. . . . We've swept away the old bad state of things with poverty, misery and hardship on the one hand and riches, idleness and culture on the other. . . . And we shall soon have reached a condition in which work and wealth will be shared by all and justice will rule between man and man."

"I've heard that tale before, Hodson, and I'm fed up with it," growled the bitter youth. "It's what the old Trade Union leaders used to tell us. . . . And a fat lot of good they ever did."

"I pin my faith on a universal strike," retorted Kinreck, with a flush in his hollow cheeks. "Naught else 'll put the lid on these *rentiers.*"

"Or a revolution," interrupted the young man, compressing his thin lips savagely. "The rich are in the saddle still, spurred and booted."

"Aye, aye, Larcey," ejaculated the elderly man, "they're the rats in the grain and the weevils in the store-house. . . . What's the justice in allowing some folk ten thousand a year? . . . Is a man a pig that he should wallow like that?"

"We shall have equality, if we've patience," said Hodson tolerantly, "and it'll be share and share alike all round."

"Well, I'm for action," cried the vitriolic Larcey. "I'm for sweeping away the drones root and branch and quickly. It is a thing worth living for. . . . Yes," he added, clenching his fists till his knuckles shone white and bony, "and it's an ideal worth dying for!"

"Clap-trap!" answered Hodson sarcastically. "You talk like an old-fashioned Nihilist. . . . There's no dying for causes nowadays. . . . Even were you to shoot Anymoon himself they wouldn't hang you. . . . You'd be simply kept in a lunatic asylum for the term of your natural life and be allowed to play billiards all day."

"If it's action you want, Larcey," broke in Kinreck, addressing the young man, "come along wi' me to Trafalgar Square. . . . Cohen's going to make a speech about those *rentiers* at nine o'clock."

"I shall be there, never fear," answered Larcey, with a menacing scowl, "and I'm bringing some pals along with me. . . . I fancy things 'll be a bit lively."

"You may bet your boots on that," said Kinreck, brushing his straggling hair from his forehead impatiently.

"I hope you young fire-brands aren't up to any mischief," said Hodson, with a sigh.

"Cohen's our leader," retorted Larcey abruptly.

A stout man with a crimson face, who was stretched at full length on a form with his back against the wall, looked up suddenly with an angry leer.

"You chaps are on the wrong tack entirely," he growled. "It's liberty what's the crying need of the times—it's liberty, I tell ye. . . . Have we got liberty, I ask ye? . . . Nawe!"

"Your notion of liberty's swilling beer all day," said Hodson contemptuously.

"What of it?" demanded the red-faced man combatively. "Man's a free agent. . . . Yet you can only be served with a drink just as you was in war-time. . . . You're only supposed to be thirsty when the Government chooses. . . . It's treating grown men like children."

"It's to prevent you from making yourself a nuisance to other folks," retorted Kinreck.

"Nawe, it's meddling with the liberty of the subject," answered the lover of ale. "It's drill-sergeant interference and Prussianism, that's what it is. . . . There was lots of ways of stopping a chap as couldn't carry his liquor from

being a nuisance. . . . They could refuse to serve him and there was the lock-ups. . . . Beer in reason never harmed a mortal soul."

"In a free State there's bound to be restriction," observed Hodson sententiously.

"Then to hell with free States, if that's your freedom," cried the red-faced man. "I've ne'er been tipsy in my life, save now and then, after a wedding or a funeral, and I've a right to my pint whether it's ten o'clock in the morning or ten o'clock at night."

"Man has a right to nothing," replied Hodson, "always bear that in mind, David."

"Ho, indeed!" exclaimed the epicurean David savagely. "So I know what to expect from you mucking Socialists."

XII

Two lugubrious foreign waiters were standing near the cash-desk at the top of the restaurant in the Carlton Hotel, gazing down the crowded room disdainfully.

"England is finished," exclaimed the taller, raising his black eyes superciliously to the white-and-gold ceiling. "It is no good at all. . . . I shall return to Paris."

"I care not for the standard wage," said the other, a swarthy little Frenchman; "it is not amusing to make the same money every week. . . . I like *le jeu de hazard*. . . . I prefer ze tip."

The eyes of the tall waiter, which had been wandering dreamily over the beaded chandeliers, swept a comprehensive glance upon the rows of small tables nearest to him.

"There would be no tip from such people as these," he replied, frowning darkly upon the crowd of diners. "They are quite different from the old . . . it is well that we do not depend on them."

"*Tonnerre*, there is no longer any hope of having any

little café of one's own in this England," said the Frenchman mournfully. "It is all the Government now. . . . There is no *motif* to save or to excel. . . . The Government spoil it all."

At that moment Thring and his party came walking down the room and the two pessimistic waiters sprang towards him obsequiously.

"This is bet-tar," murmured the tall waiter to his colleague behind his hand, and then fawning upon Thring, "I have a table prepared for you in the centre, milord. . . . I will show you."

At the unfamiliar sound of a title several startled diners glanced up from their plates with a grimace of disapproval.

The Carlton Hotel, which was now the property of the State, possessed still, like the Ritz and the Berkeley, one of the most excellent restaurants in London. A band played continuously in the palm court and the cuisine was good and daintily served, but its clientèle had to be content with table d'hôte meals at a fixed price, a uniform menu being the rule at all Government eating-houses by order of the Council. Evening dress had ceased to be obligatory at dinner, for such a regulation would have been regarded as an insult to Democracy, which—if it chose, as occasionally some of it did—was permitted to display itself in shirt sleeves. Likewise the democratic pipe was no longer taboo. It was owing to the diplomacy of the management, which separated the sheep from the goats with consummate tact in different parts of the room, that the place continued to be patronised by its old habitués.

"François," said Thring to the tall waiter, pointing with displeasure to a meagre bunch of daffodils in a vase upon his table, "where are the roses I ordered?"

"Very sorry, milord," answered the waiter. "But the Inspector of Hotels come round yesterday and he say that no more special flowers are to be provided. . . . They must be all the same for everybody."

"And remember, dad," observed Cyril, "the rose is

not an emblem of Democracy. . . . It suggests wars and mysticism or cabbages and kings."

"I'm not a bit surprised," growled Thring, taking a seat. "They'll be trying to pass a law to make us all the same height."

"Don't be vexed, Mr. Thring," said Betty, sitting beside him, "the yellow goes so well with Grace's frock, doesn't it?"

François bent over Thring's shoulder insinuatingly.

"I have arrange that you shall have your pêches Melba, milord," he whispered. "It is against the rules, as you know, but I manage it."

"Let me see the menu," said Thring impatiently.

An obese Government official, seated in the glass screen near the entrance with a flamboyant wife in a scarlet silk dress and a toque of green feathers, leant across the table and gripped his companion's arm.

"See that old bird over there," he muttered. "Him with the two knuts in evening dress and those flashy girls. . . . That's Thring. . . . Member of the Council. . . . Rum old sport. . . . He's one of the richest men in Great Britain. . . . Got fifteen thousand a year."

"Disgraceful!" she answered, with a toss of her verdant head-gear. "And just look at the young women. . . . I never set eyes on such pieces."

And she glared across the room at Grace and Betty, who were looking very sweet and girlish in their pretty gowns.

François was handing round a magnum of Clicquot at the Thring table. Greatly to the chagrin of the extremists, it had been found impracticable to place an embargo on the import of champagne without offending the French nation irreparably. The more expensive brands were not even taxed, for a duty on wine no longer being necessary for the sake of revenue, such an impost would have violated the sacred precepts of Free Trade. Fire-brands like Cohen, whose favourite beverage was gin, inveighed against the luxury persistently, and he had many supporters all over the country.

"You are still amazingly conservative in London, dad," said Cyril, raising his glass to his lips. "If I were to drink champagne at a public restaurant in Lancashire I should run the risk of being lynched."

"There is a scheme to introduce a standard wine," remarked Darell. "A committee is arranging terms with the French Government."

"Yes," added Thring, "there'll be one universal brand before long. . . . A special label is an offence against that blessed word Democracy. . . . It will be the same with cigars. . . . Tobacco is going to be all mixed like tea was when the Food Controllers made asses of themselves during the Great War."

"And perhaps jam will be all pulped up together," said Betty, with a shudder. "It's the only way to make rhubarb and gooseberries equal to pine-apples."

Grace Dalrymple was feeling depressed and weary, her usual high spirits having momentarily vanished altogether. A sense of impending disaster, vague and nebulous, but insistent, weighed heavily upon her mind. Intuition seemed to whisper that the decision to postpone her marriage had been a right one, and the conviction that her apprehensions were justified naturally intensified her despondency. She strove bravely to banish her gloom, joining eagerly in the conversation of her companions, but a look of pain often stole into her eyes, and her face—always resemblant of some fair Madonna in the canvas of an old master—now wore a like aspect of sorrow for the tribulations of mankind.

Although Darell, observing that she was sad, endeavoured to cheer her by simulating gaiety, he also felt despondent and uneasy. He too was apprehensive of what the immediate future would bring forth. As he had walked across to the hotel from his flat in Piccadilly he had observed with surprise and disquietude that the people in the streets—and to-night the crowds had been larger and more excited than he had ever known them—seemed to have become infected with a spirit of turbulence and unrest. Groups of angry men were babbling impreca-

tions against the Government. Within the Green Park several impassioned speakers, surrounded by a seething mob, were inciting their auditors to rebellion. The parrot cries of "Down with the *rentiers*!" and "Equality for all men!" which the tub-orator had shrieked persistently since the Commonwealth had been established, were louder and more truculent than ever before. Frequently he was cursed and jostled by passers-by, who were exasperated by the sight of his dress-suit. But for a large body of police, who kept the people in motion, the traffic in the streets would have come to a standstill. Certainly, since the night on which the new Republic had been proclaimed, Darell had never beheld so great a crowd.

"We had the greatest difficulty in getting here," Grace told him at last, hinting at her misgivings for the first time. "Our car was held up every few yards. . . . What is happening?"

He glanced at her adoringly, thinking that he had never seen her look more handsome than she did this evening, with her round arms and smooth shoulders gleaming above the fabric of her corsage, her grey eyes shining wistfully, and a glimpse of white between her fluttering red lips, while the rich gold of her hair glowed in harmony with the pearls around her throat and the green silk of her dress.

"What is the reason of these crowds?" she persisted, when he made no reply.

He started out of the reverie into which his contemplation of her had plunged him.

"Cohen is addressing a meeting in Trafalgar Square," he answered evasively, "and he is a popular attraction."

"Gollywog!" cried Betty derisively.

"All the same he's a power in the land," said Cyril. "I don't know whom I'd sooner back—him or Anymoon."

"I should put my money on Old Noll," observed Thring reflectively. "He's got more staying power than the Hebrew."

"You think that it will come to a trial of strength

between the two men?" inquired Grace, deeply interested.

"Undoubtedly," replied Thring, thrusting out his hooked nose combatively, "and thank my stars that I'm one of the Anymoon party."

"Yes," said Darell quietly. "He is too wily for the Jew."

Just at that moment, Hothersall, the Lancastrian delegate, followed by Phillips, the Metropolitan Councillor, came bustling headlong through the crowded restaurant, square-shouldered and aggressive, pushing his way churlishly between the chairs and tables. Flinging himself into a seat, he tucked a serviette under his bearded chin briskly.

"'E, man, I'm as hungry as a hunter," he remarked to his colleague. "Haven't had a bite since noon. . . . Hi, young felly," addressing the attendant François. "Bring me a porterhouse steak and a pint of stout, there's a good lad."

The Frenchman's dark eyebrows rose towards his glossy hair.

"Very sorry, sir," he answered dolefully. "But that is not on the bill of fare."

"Gammon!" replied the North-countryman wrathfully. "Chops and steaks is provided everywhere."

"You can only get 'em in the grill-room here," explained Phillips, sitting down on the other side of the table. "There's a fixed dinner in the restaurant."

"Here is the menu, sir," prattled François, at lightning speed. "Soup, fish, entrée, meat or poultry, sweets and cheese, with dessert and coffee afterwards, if you desire."

"Well, I'm blessed!" cried Hothersall. "Folks's insides 'll favour a menagerie pretty soon if they come here often. . . . Well, bring up owt that's ready and look slippy. . . . I'm fair clemmed."

"Going to Cohen's meeting to-night?" demanded Phillips, trying to smooth his flowing locks after a self-conscious glance at the occupants of the adjacent tables.

"Not me," retorted Hothersall vindictively. "I don't hold any truck with them Syndicalists."

"He's got a following and a big one," answered Phillips, with a far-away look in his yearning eyes. "Anyone can see that who takes the trouble to walk through the streets."

Half an hour later, when Thring and his party were leaving the building by the door leading into the Haymarket, they beheld a tempestuous multitude surging through Pall Mall towards Trafalgar Square. A straggling line of stationary omnibuses was strewn along the roadside between Marlborough House and Waterloo Place, the traffic having been brought to a standstill by the crowds that were pouring eastward from Piccadilly through St. James's Street. For the most part it seemed a boisterous rather than a vicious crowd, pressing forward impetuously towards its goal with tumultuous cheering and bellowing forth the British version of the "Marseillaise." Wild shouts for Cohen burst incessantly from a thousand throats.

A row of constables was guarding the entrance into the hotel from the Haymarket, for although there were fewer people here in the street, a ribald crowd was gathered in the roadway, jeering at everyone who drove away in taxi-cab or motor-car. Like an ill-trained dog they yapped with uncontrollable fury at the sight of anything on wheels. As Thring's Rolls-Royce came up, a woman, standing on the edge of the pavement, sprang forward and spat upon the window-pane. A burst of merriment arose from the onlookers.

"Why can't you foot it same as we?" cried the woman derisively. "I've got to be content with tubes and buses."

"That's one of Cohen's disciples," observed Thring cynically, as he followed the girls into the car. "The manners of the people are being ruined by those demagogues."

At the top of the Haymarket the crowd was denser, but the majority, hurrying to the theatre and the cinema,

displayed no indications of social jealousy. Occasionally, however, when the car was held up for a moment by a block in the traffic, an angry face scowled upon the occupants and a muttered imprecation would reach their ears.

"We appear to be unpopular, dad," said Cyril. "I can see no signs of the Brotherhood of Man."

"I wish I'd put on a mackintosh and walked," cried Betty, with a nervous laugh.

They reached their destination without further annoyance. There was no rude throng outside the Empire, but a great crowd was pouring into the theatre and Thring and his companions had some difficulty in making their way through the front entrance. The curtain was just rising as they entered their box.

XIII

Up in the flies above the stage of the theatre a couple of lime-men, seated on their perches a few yards apart, were abusing the principal comedian lustily.

"Didn't give me so much as a tanner, the perisher," growled he of the green lamp. "Had the cheek to siy it were bad citizenship."

"Sime here," retorted the other, inserting a pink slide with a petulant slap, "and 'im fobbing a hundred quid a week."

"And the worst of it is the blighter's worth it," said the green lime-man regretfully.

"Ga on," retorted the pink lime-man. "Ow d'you mike that out? . . . Grawnted the show couldn't git on without him, no more it could without you or me. . . . They need loims as well as funny men."

"Maybe, sonny, but the beggar knows the public come to see him so he mikes them piy for it . . . They don't come here to look at you or me."

"I'd dock his screw one half if I'd my wiy."

"He'd go on strike, my lad. . . . It's a free land."

"Let 'im! . . . There's lots 'd like to pliy his part."

"Aye, and they'd empty the theatre. . . . I don't love the mucking little blighter any more than you, but facts is facts. . . . 'E's a public favourite, blast 'im, and in this cursed world them as does anythink the public wants can get their own proice . . . and so it'll be to the end of the chapter. . . . I wish they were as fond of loims as they are of comic singers, bli me."

The curtain rose and the performance commenced. Almost every seat in the great theatre was occupied. There was little distinction in costume between the crowd in the pit, which now stretched across more than one half of the floor, and the people in the stalls, since even the women, with few exceptions, did not wear evening dress. Those in the cheaper parts of the house perhaps showed better taste in their attire, for the more expensive seats were appropriated by the *nouveaux riches*, captains of industry and their families, who had been raised by merit to a position of affluence. For the most part the costlier gowns were gaudy and ill-suited to their wearers. A few expansive white waistcoats and opulent bare shoulders gleamed in the semi-darkness as the lights were turned low. In its general appearance the audience was very similar to that of a music-hall in a large provincial town previous to the war.

The occupants of the boxes seemed much the same as they always had been, belonging unmistakably to the old noblesse or to the bourgeois class of the previous régime. Several pretty girls and a few smart men occupied seats in the first tier; some of the latter, like Thring, displaying a badge on the lapels of their coats, showing that they were members of the Council or Government officials of high eminence. From a large box next to the stage the flabby, lemon-coloured face of the massive Crannock, who had a sharp-featured little wife sitting by his side, looked forth imperturbably upon the scene.

The revue was a playful satire upon the manners of

former days, an obvious piece of propaganda on behalf of the new order of things. Its plot was of the slightest, showing the embarrassments of an old-world peer who was supposed to have been marooned in a South Sea island at the outbreak of the war and who had returned to England, wholly unaware that a revolution had taken place, expecting to find everything the same as it had been in the year 1914. The piece suited the temper of the audience perfectly. They roared with uncontrollable laughter at the paroxysms of the proud nobleman when he came to realise, with difficulty and after many humiliating efforts to take up the threads of his life as he had left them, that his wealth and his privileges had vanished. He was made the victim of all kinds of ludicrous experiences. He visited the House of Lords, dressed in his robes, but instead of attending the opening of Parliament, found himself abducted into one of the National operating theatres by a crowd of zealous professors, who believed that he was a patient come to have his leg amputated. He drove up to Buckingham Palace in court dress and was taken for a teacher of elocution who was going to lecture to some of the members of the ex-London County Council, now the Metropolitan Commune. He went shooting on his old estate, but was amazed to discover that there was not a hare or pheasant to be seen, and was ducked in a pond by a crowd of irate farmers for trampling down their crops. In a score of different ways he was made to realise that he was no longer a *grand seigneur*. It was a part that suited the principal comedian admirably and he was extremely funny as the elderly peer.

"Rather personal, dad, isn't it?" said the irreverent Cyril mischievously.

"D'you mean he is like me?" replied Thring, with a sardonic laugh.

"Oh, not the least bit," cried Betty ingenuously, regarding the painted features of the palpitating little comedian in horror.

Cyril smiled.

"You were wise enough to back the winning side, dad," he continued, "some of them didn't."

. . . . . .

Meanwhile, Trafalgar Square had been invaded by a stupendous crowd and all its vast spaces were choked and brimming over. The multitude had expanded into the adjacent thoroughfares, spreading its tentacles along the Strand and through Whitehall, up St. Martin's Lane and down Northumberland Avenue. As far as the eye could reach, a mass of upturned faces—faces that gleamed white, eager and menacing in the glare of the arc lamps—was ebbing and flowing in restless waves like the swell of a rising sea. From time to time a low growl of anger seemed to come booming from the swollen depths, or a tempest of cheering swept fiercely across the surface of the mighty throng.

It was a still evening, with a clear, star-lit sky. Every window around the great square was alight and open wide, silhouetting a cluster of heads within each casement. All the roof-tops were covered with a motionless swarm of tiny figures, blurred and almost indistinguishable, high up in the darkness. Every statue and parapet was crowded with a fluttering mass of human beings struggling to find a place of vantage. Even the basins of the fountains were filled with people, standing ankle deep in the water. And over all a rising moon, in its first quarter, shone like a silver scimitar in the west.

On the plinth of the tall column two flares blazed forth with sudden brightness. Between them, on a raised platform, the figure of a man, a small man with a bushy beard and black tumbling locks, rose quickly high above the crowd, his right hand upraised imperiously as though he demanded silence.

A mighty shout went up from the thousand throats, and the sea of faces was lashed into storm. From end to end of the great square the cheers crashed forth, wild, ecstatic and vengeful, the frenzied cries of a multitude that hails a declaration of war. It was Cohen, the National Councillor, Cohen, the friend of the people, come

hither, as all knew, to fling down his gauntlet, so that the whole nation might behold, at the feet of the President himself. It was rebellion, swift, craftily-planned rebellion, in order to take the enemy unawares.

A sudden hush fell upon the vast assemblage. The insurgent Jew walked to the edge of the platform, raising aloft both arms. The glare of the torches fell full upon his face, kindling his black eyes into sudden flame and lighting up his pale, gnarled cheeks, and the whole aspect of the man, with his fierce nose and straggling beard, seemed ominous of strife. Sweeping his hands in front of him with an impatient gesture, he began to speak in a shrill, querulous voice, but a voice that went ringing far into the depths of the multitude.

Every word he uttered was an incentive to insurrection. He told the people that they were slaves who had never tasted freedom, who had been satisfied hitherto with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. He declared that there was as yet no liberty, but that they had been duped and deluded into accepting a tyranny as complete and inexorable as the tyranny of a King and a Parliament.

"I despise the law!" he screamed. "I will do my utmost to bring it into contempt. . . . I care not for the law nor for its administrators—"

"The voice of the people is the voice of God," he shrieked, amidst a tempest of applause. "I wish always to hear it clear and distinct, and when I do I will obey it as a divine call—"

"So what of you, the people of the Commonwealth?" he continued. "Tell me your commands. . . . Are you content to remain as you are now?"

And a mighty roar came thundering back to him.

"No."

He drew back a pace from the edge of the platform, folding his arms with a menacing scowl.

"Hereditary bondsmen," he shouted, clawing his black beard with his bony fingers, "know ye not, who would be free themselves must strike the blow."

And while the tumultuous shouting burst forth again the

hollow-cheeked Kinreck, standing close to the plinth of the column, turned ecstatically to his companion Larcey.

"He's right," he muttered. "We shall have to help ourselves."

Larcey's thin, clean-shaven lips were compressed in a bitter smile.

"It's a priceless truth," he responded, "and I'll follow him to the death."

"High-falutin' balderdash," observed the philosophic Hodson, who had come with them to the meeting, "and it's not original either. . . . It all comes from Tom Mann or John Wilkes."

"Who the hell's John Wilkes?" demanded Kinreck, with a contemptuous toss of his tow-like hair.

"He talked this very same rubbish a hundred and fifty years ago," answered Hodson cynically. "But he ate it all up before he kicked the bucket."

"Death to all tyrants, say I," cried the wild, shrill voice from the high platform. . . . "The will of the people must rule throughout the length and breadth of the land."

The crowd hung upon his every word with rapture, as the speaker played upon their emotions as a skilful musician plays upon his instrument. He seemed to hold his auditors in the hollow of his hand, arousing them to the highest pitch of anger or plunging them into the lowest depths of gloom. And as they listened to him each person in the vast throng became aware that he was a down-trodden wretch, the victim of a merciless autocracy. The speech was a long one, lasting for an hour and a half, and before its close the mob had been whipped into the wildest frenzy. Finally, with folded arms, Cohen declaimed his carefully-studied peroration.

"A few hundred yards away in the west lives your President in the palace of kings. . . . Go to him, people of the Commonwealth. . . . Go to him in your mighty strength and tell him that all the idle rich must be swept away. . . . Let your cry be 'Down with the *rentiers*!' . . . And if he will not listen let his blood be upon his

own head. . . . There can be no mercy for a tyrant. . . . Go to him, go to your President . . . now and at once."

The index finger of the claw-like hand was thrust forth threateningly in the direction of the Park. For a moment the multitude stood in hushed silence. Then there was a tumultuous seething, as when a stick is driven into a great ant-heap, and with a wild shout the crowd began to stream away in all directions towards St. James's Palace.

. . . . . .

The entertainment at the Empire Theatre was drawing to a close. In the last scene the much-harassed peer was made to settle down contentedly as a farmer upon one of the farms on his old estate, his sons and daughters working with him as agricultural labourers. The humour of the situation was provided by the conjectured awkwardness and imbecility of those neophytes in the performance of their unfamiliar duties. It was in this part that the principal comedian sang a topical song—in praise of the new régime—which had become extremely popular. Its chorus began with the line "We are different nowadays."

For some time the little comedian had been discontented and unwell. Like most good actors he had been a Tory of the old school and he had never taken kindly to the Great Change. Government regulations had altered his mode of life entirely. Alcoholic refreshment was forbidden in the dressing-room. After the show he was no longer able to proceed to his favourite restaurant in Leicester Square for a hot supper and a tankard of ale or a pint of wine. Midnight meals were tabooed by the State as "anti-social" and incompatible with equality, which, from a digestive point of view, certainly they always were. The dissatisfied player also had to submit to much interference in his professional business. He was not allowed to simulate drunkenness on the stage, hitherto one of his most appreciated specialities. He was not even permitted to mention the word *drink*, a restriction that had deprived him of half his stock of humour. Moreover, his leading lady, and he had always

prided himself upon having a most fastidious taste in the matter of leading ladies, was now an uncouth and unfamiliar figure in his sight, for she was compelled by law to wear a skirt that reached to her heels, as a gleaming ankle or a silken calf was considered a "reactionary" spectacle. To use his own expressive phrase, the principal comedian was "fed up with their mucking Socialism."

Brooding over his grievances, he had determined to mutiny, or, as he himself put it, to "show the beggars" what he "bloody well thought of them." A means of retaliation soon occurred to him and he set himself to compose an extra verse to his topical song.

"They shall have it straight from the chest," he muttered. "I'll let it rip!"

For some time he had hesitated to venture upon his revenge, but at last, on this particular evening, his patience had become exhausted. He had been exasperated by the importunities of some of the stage-hands who told him with palms extended that they were "with the loims," and he had suffered the indignity of being fined five pounds for informing a brother-actor who impersonated one of the State physicians in the first scene that he was "blind." The contents of a flask of brandy, which he had smuggled into his dressing-room, had supplied the necessary driving-power and he resolved to hurl his extra verse at the audience come what might.

To-night the song, which had a haunting melody, had gone better than ever. It was encored once, twice, three times, and each time the comedian returned to the stage and sang the time-honoured variations which the public knew off by heart. Finally, when it was called for once again by the delighted house, he advanced to the footlights with a defiant leer and bellowed forth his new interpretation of the chorus:

"We had good old-fashioned ways
In good King George's days,
Though, of course, those times must seem quite strange to you;
For we'd decent manners then,
And were sometimes gentlemen,
But I'm damned if I can say the same of you."

For a moment there was silence, while the little comedian, with his finger on his nose, glanced up contemptuously into the flies at the genii of the pink and green lamps. Then, as one man and with a fierce yell of execration, the audience rose from their seats, hooting and hissing. In an instant a couple of managers and a carpenter or two had rushed on to the stage and had bundled the offending comedian off into the wings.

"Bli me, the little perisher's fairly got their rag out," cried the green lime-man. "They'll be over the footlights and savage 'im."

"Thank 'Evin we're sife up here," said the pink lime-man.

For a while it appeared as though the enraged audience would rush upon the stage. One half of the male occupants of the pit and stalls were standing on their seats. Men and women alike were booing and whistling. Fists were shaken and sticks upraised in fierce anger. Then the curtain was lowered and the lights went up, and the orchestra began to play a popular air.

Suddenly, a man in a cloth cap leant far over the balustrade in the upper circle, waving his arms.

"Down with the idle rich!" he bellowed. "To hell with the *rentiers*!"

It was as though a spark had fallen into a powder magazine. In a moment the transgression of the comedian was forgotten, and the fury of the vast audience was turned into a new direction. The recollection of Cohen and his crusade seemed to sweep irresistibly through the minds of all. A thousand throats echoed the furious war-cry:

"Down with the *rentiers*!"

In both of the upper galleries a raging mass of humanity was struggling to reach the front of the circle. From the back of the pit a crowd of young men began to force its way across the auditorium, clambering over the benches. A shout arose, echoed from one end of the house to the other:

"Chuck them all out of the stalls."

Missiles were flung in all directions. Apples and oranges rained down from the galleries. An egg, hurled from the upper circle, burst full upon the feathered toque of the Government official's wife, who was seated near the orchestra, dripping in oleaginous streams over her scarlet gown. The tall figure of Thring, white-haired and gesticulating, rose in the stage-box, as he leant forward with waving arms, striving impotently to quell the tumult. Cyril laid his hand protestingly on his shoulder.

"Better leave it to the police, dad," he whispered.

"There's going to be a riot," cried Betty in dismay.

"I think it is a revolution," said Grace calmly.

Crannock was standing in the front of his box, his large yellow face convulsed with indignation, and he shook his fist vehemently at the rioters in the pit.

"Don't interfere," exclaimed his little wife hysterically. "They may turn on you."

"I'll tell the manager to put the hose pipe on to them," he growled, striding to the door.

Presently, at the height of the tumult the theatre was plunged into sudden darkness and the lens of the cinema threw a gleaming circle upon the white cloth that had been lowered across the stage. A swift silence followed and in an instant all was still. The vast audience stood spell-bound, watching breathlessly for what was to come. Then a sentence in bold, firm handwriting was flashed upon the screen. It was a handwriting with which all were familiar, the handwriting of the President of the Commonwealth.

"I have decided to ask the Council to abolish the *rentier*. JOSEPH ANYMOON."

For a moment the spectators gazed upon the message incredulously, and then, as the triumphant melody of the "Marseillaise" swelled from the orchestra and the lights were raised, a wild, exultant shout went pealing to the roof. Men and women jumped for joy like children, dancing madly in the keenness of their ecstasy, shaking one another frantically by the hand. Only in the stalls

and the boxes were there a few anxious faces and bewildered mutterings.

"That puts the lid on things—eh, dad?" said Cyril to his father.

"Apostate!" gasped Thring. "He has forsworn himself utterly."

"I shall have to go in for ready-mades," sighed Betty.

In his box on the other side the massive Crannock, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, was surveying the cheering multitude with a perplexed smile.

"The rascal," he murmured, "the clever rascal! . . . And he'll have sent that message to every theatre in Great Britain."

"I don't call it clever," snapped his sharp-featured wife. "He had to put a spoke into Cohen's wheel, so it was the obvious thing to do."

"Only the great statesman is wise enough to perceive the obvious," answered Crannock sententiously.

XIV

THE clock in St. Stephen's Tower had just boomed the hour of eleven. From every adjacent thoroughfare a great multitude was pouring into St. James's Park. Throughout the West End of London the streets were echoing with the tramp of footsteps, swift, ceaseless, ominous footsteps, the tread of a vast army on its march. The sea of faces, stern, white, menacing, flowed along irresistibly, as the tide of humanity, in full flood, pressed its giant waves ever onwards, engulfing by degrees all the open spaces in its course. The clamouring had ceased and there was a great silence, broken only by the sound of the tramping feet.

The crescent moon had set and an east wind had sprung up, the keen breeze seeming to have burnished more brightly the host of glittering stars. Down the

wide Mall the rustling leaves in their first pride of springtime were swaying and murmuring above the heads of the passing throng. From end to end of the broad avenue the roadway was swept by a rising sea, tempest-tossed and broadening its bounds unceasingly, as thousands of fresh faces came pouring from the streets. The Green Park was filled with people. The multitude soon stretched in a vast unbroken mass as far as the Parade, overflowing from the Mall to the borders of the lake, trampling over shrubs and flower-beds in its relentless progress. Hundreds who had clambered over the Palace walls, stood huddled together in the garden.

Above the southern horizon the dial in St. Stephen's Clock-tower, which still kept watch and ward over the metropolis, gleamed like a great moon in the sky. A few lights twinkled in the blocks of buildings beyond Birdcage Walk, but the Park was buried in deep darkness and not a window was lit up in either of the two great palaces. A black and savage gloom, akin to that which dwelt in the hearts of men, seemed to brood over all things. And all around, in the far distance, there sounded the ceaseless tramp of hurried footsteps.

Suddenly, a murmur came from the depths of the crowd, faint and uncertain at first, but which rose and swelled until it burst into a mighty roar:

"Give us equality!"

From Storey's Gate as far as Hyde Park Corner, from Buckingham Palace Road to Waterloo Place, the vast multitude joined in the fierce chorus:

"Give us equality!"

Perched on a corner of the wall opposite to Marlborough House, the fire-brand Larcey, bare-headed and dishevelled, was gesticulating wrathfully to the crowd below.

"Where is the President?" he shrieked. "Let him show himself."

And a thousand voices responded with the insistent chant:

"We want the President."

A stone, flung from the garden, went crashing through one of the dark windows of St. James's Palace. Amidst a yell of triumph a torrent of missiles flew through the air and in a moment every pane of glass was shivered to atoms. But there was no sign of life or light within. The whole of the long façade still remained in darkness.

"He has fled," screamed the passionate Larcey from his pinnacle. "He's afraid of the people."

Howls of execration uprose from the multitude and fresh crowds went surging over into the gardens, struggling furiously to reach the walls. With waving sticks and fists upraised, the mob in the wall began to crush inwards from east to west towards the Palace. It seemed as though the building would be carried by storm.

Then, from the summit of St. Stephen's Tower the piercing glare of a search-light shot across the dark sky, sweeping swiftly around the black horizon until it came to rest upon the roof of Buckingham Palace. And as it stood still, revealing the centre of the façade within its radiant disk, it illumined also the figure of a man, standing upright on the topmost parapet with his hand clasped upon the flagstaff. All could recognise the figure at a glance, microscopic though it appeared owing to the height and distance, for it was the form of a stalwart man with a dome-like forehead, who stood erect and dominant as though conscious that he was a ruler of men. A tumultuous shout arose.

"Anymoon . . . Old Noll . . . the President."

In a moment the fury of the people was appeased. The dramatic apparition appealed to the curiosity of the most virulent. All were eager to know why the President had revealed himself to his people in such an unexpected way, and everyone felt instinctively that he must have some message to communicate. A sudden stillness fell upon the multitude.

Still grasping the flagstaff in his left hand, Anymoon raised a megaphone to his lips.

"People of the Commonwealth,"—the words, uttered

with the full strength of his stout lungs, went booming far across the Park,—" in obedience to your wishes I have decided to abolish the *rentier*."

He paused. The people within the broad circle of those to whom his words were audible passed on the message to those outside the fringe, who passed it on again to others, and the murmur of the glad tidings swelled into an ever-increasing circumference as a ripple spreads out upon the surface of the water. From a hundred thousand throats a wild cry of triumph swept from end to end of the wide parks. Men and women flung their arms around one another's necks, almost weeping in their joy. They sang and danced and laughed in their glee. Hundreds of hats were tossed away heedlessly into the air.

Again the megaphone was raised, and once more there was silence.

"Order is Heaven's first law," thundered the great voice. "The duty of a people is to obey those whom it places in authority. . . . The law has given liberty and equality to all, and if any man seeks to persuade you to break the peace, the law will show him no mercy."

The voice ceased, and the cheering, even louder and more frantic than before, burst forth again.

"That's one on the nob for Cohen," said Hodson, who with his companion Kinreck had been swept by the crowd close to the railings of Buckingham Palace, "and it serves him jolly well right."

"It's reactionary and it's all wrong," retorted Kinreck. "It's for the people to command, not to obey."

"Anarchist!" replied Hodson contemptuously.

"Anyhow, but for Cohen we never should have won this victory," said Kinreck, a flush on his hollow cheeks. "Still, Anymoon's slipped in and collared all the credit, I grant you. . . . He's a crafty old scoundrel is Old Noll."

"Aye," said Hodson exultantly. "It was a masterly move. . . . It's like a scene in a play his appearing there on the roof in the lime-light. . . . But I didn't like him using a megaphone. . . . It's too theatrical."

High up on the roof of Buckingham Palace—now the home of the London Commune—the upright figure with the high forehead stood in the full glare of the searchlight, immovable as a statue, while the crowds below almost bowed down and worshipped him.

PART II

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

I

IT must be confessed, in common honesty, that the action of President Anymoon in abolishing the *rentier* did not bring about the industrial chaos and financial dislocation which the leaders of the leisurely party, like Thring and Crannock, had prophesied so emphatically. The mischief, such as it was, had been done already. It was a small matter comparatively to confiscate the remaining fraction that the capitalist had been permitted to retain as his own when the other four-fifths of his property had been commandeered long ago. Having swallowed a camel the nation had no difficulty in absorbing a gnat.

The first expropriation, although carried out with actuarial exactitude and merely following to their logical conclusion principles that had been accepted previously as political truths, had shattered the economic structure of the whole community. Its obvious and inevitable effect was a complete and immediate redistribution of wealth. Eighty per cent of the personal riches of the country had become the property of the State. Thus, the parvenu Commonwealth, in its newly-acquired affluence, had been justified, in the opinion of its financial experts, in abolishing all taxation and in fixing a generous standard wage for every man and woman. The rich had been made poorer and the poor richer, which, in the eyes of the latter-day social reformers, who were not concerned so

much in abolishing grievances as in destroying privileges, was just as it should be.

Naturally, the effect upon the labour market had been stupendous. Most of those whom the disciples of Cohen had termed the "idle rich"—amounting with their families and immediate dependents to one-fifth of the people—had been compelled to become workers and to undertake various employments of which they had no previous knowledge. Vast crowds of lawyers, stockbrokers and bankers, with their entourage, found their occupation gone. All those concerned in the so-called "luxury trades," and their name was legion, whether shopkeepers or manufacturers, had to wind up their businesses. There was little demand for domestic or for hotel servants, and most persons connected directly or indirectly with the private motor-trade, or with horses, had to seek a fresh job. The entire re-shuffling of several millions of the population was the first essential problem which the Government had to solve.

Anymoon and his followers had preached the gospel of patience. The state of transition, they insisted, was bound to inflict hardship and inconvenience upon the dispossessed until a complete and effectual reconstruction had been accomplished. They pointed out, and they gave illustrations to support their arguments, that the reconstruction itself would absorb the vast majority of those whose previous occupations had become unnecessary. The employees in the West End shops, for example, would be monopolised no longer in fabricating or in dispensing frivolities for a privileged class, but would be employed in the production of necessities for the masses. The man who used to make patent-leather boots with kid tops would merely transfer his craftsmanship to cow-hides. Although gossamer *lingerie* might disappear there would be all the greater need for the fabrics of Dr. Jager. There would be fewer private motor-cars, but more public ones. It was simply a question of adjusting supply and demand. Only a matter of time! Very soon there would be a place for everyone and everybody would be put in his or her place.

This comforting doctrine was justified to a large extent by actual experience. There was an immense and immediate activity in the building trade, and in every trade allied to it, owing to the vast demand for service flats caused by the great social change, so that every architect, builder and contractor, and all those dependent upon them, could only keep pace with his job by working overtime and on Sundays. Officers in the Army and the Navy also had been conciliated for the time being by being drafted *en masse* to posts under the National Service Board, but since there were ugly rumours that the compulsory military training eventually was to be conducted on lines of the strictest economy the more imaginative of these warriors were somewhat anxious in regard to the future. The barristers, moreover, luckily for the peace of the community, had managed to look after themselves effectually, most of them having secured lucrative places under Government. There was work for all, work in abundance, and the chief task of the new statecraft was to see that it was done.

So far this problem had not obtruded itself. Like a benevolent parent the State had been content to distribute pocket-money lavishly among its children, without troubling very much whether they earned it, and certainly wholly oblivious of the fact that the production of this wealth depended entirely upon the industry of the children themselves. A people that supports itself by taking in each other's washing can only enjoy a sufficiency of clean linen when everybody does an equal turn at the mangle and the copper. If one man washes half a dozen shirts while his neighbour cleanses only one, it is obvious that someone will have to go short. Of course, Anymoon was quite aware of the fact. Having dismantled a complicated piece of machinery and assembled its parts in an entirely different form, he realised that although the mechanism was less incongruous than formerly it did not follow that its productive power would be as great.

Naturally, the redistribution of labour had caused much hardship and dissatisfaction. The man-milliner of un-

certain age or the plump merchant of sedentary habits grumbled exceedingly when compelled to remove himself to a distant part of the country and transform himself into a bricklayer or a paper-hanger, although he knew that the dearth of these artisans in that particular locality made such conscription imperative. Their wives, too, in most cases, became conscientious and sometimes exceedingly unconscientious objectors. In almost every little cog and wheel of the State machinery there was friction. Ungrateful citizens protested that a new tyranny had been established, as harsh and unrelenting as Prussian militarism. Anymoon waxed exceedingly wroth at this lack of public spirit, imploring the malcontents to learn a lesson from the navvies, those patient nomads, who were willing to turn their hands to anything and go anywhere. The Adullamites retorted that they were not navvies, that nature had not intended them to be navvies, and that, at their time of life, it was ridiculous to try. And though Anymoon still counselled patience during the period of transition and until the Adullamites were all dead and buried, he perceived the force of the argument; but he placed his trust in the future, when the scientists would have succeeded in so harnessing and embellishing nature that a new race would arise—a race of navvy-like intellectuals who would be able to handle a pick, or write a set of lyrics, or make a pair of trousers with equal facility. For unless man was versatile there could be no equality. The tailor with justice would always regard himself as superior to the poet.

Meanwhile, he had striven to make the Commonwealth as perfect as modern political science could fashion it, avoiding many of the pitfalls that the opponents of Communism had indicated. Believing that it was impossible to transmogrify human nature in the twinkling of an eye, he had acted on the principle that men of exceptional ability must receive exceptional remuneration. Consequently, the great captains of industry had been retained in their commands. Lord Leverhulme, for example, still controlled the destinies of Port Sunlight at the maximum

salary of £5000 a year. Lord Northcliffe, too, had been persuaded to conduct the *State Times* and the *National Daily Mail* on similar terms. Whenever a great manufacturer was seen to be worth his salt he had been allowed to manage his former business subject to Government control. "We must rope in all the great brains," said Anymoon, and in his mind's eye he pulled a snook at those who, like Harold Cox, had prophesied that the advent of Socialism would ring the death-knell of individuality.

Moreover, he had endeavoured to steer clear of another yawning pitfall, into which every anti-socialist writer had declared that he must tumble sooner or later. He had taken care not to be engulfed in the dark abyss of bureaucracy. The simplicity of the new Constitution had enabled him to conduct the affairs of State with a minimum of officials. The decentralisation of authority, which had swept away or diminished so many Government departments, had left him with far fewer hungry mouths to fill. The local authorities, although they grumbled at the parsimony, had been prevailed upon to carry on with their old staff, only slightly augmented, for Anymoon had insisted that, since autonomy ought to be the very essence of a socialistic community, industrial affairs would get along very well by themselves. It was the old Manchester *laisser-faire* philosophy, communised and brought up to date.

Nevertheless, in one department Anymoon had been unable to avoid a multiplication of the official, and in this direction the dangerous pitfall yawned very widely indeed. The vast redistribution of labour had necessitated the establishment of a great National Work Bureau with local branches all over the country. Without an adequate Civil Service to organise and direct them the new race of bricklayers and paper-hangers never would have been mobilised at all. With every fresh re-shuffling of classes a new batch of officials had to be enrolled. Indeed, a cynic alleged that, in spite of his good intentions, Anymoon eventually would be obliged to employ as many task-masters as Pharaoh.

Even some of those who were not cynics began to prophesy that in course of time every man would have an "Egyptian" to look after him. Four-fifths of the nation, having more opportunities for pleasure, were determined to work no harder than they were obliged. One-fifth, having been made extremely uncomfortable, was resolved to do as little work as possible. The new machinery was a goodly piece of mechanism to look at, simple, well-balanced and exact, but it was obviously short of boiler-power, or, to complete the metaphor, there was not enough *steam* to drive it, and Anymoon was well aware there would be a shortage of steam until the four-fifths and the one-fifth could be prevailed upon to provide it. The hours of manual labour had been restricted to thirty-two a week.

With the extinction of the *rentier* the last remaining vestige of the capitalist class had been swept away. The only plutocrats that remained were the Government officials and the captains of industry—all those, in fact, who were in receipt of a salary over and above the standard wage of a pound a day. It was these alone, or rather the most highly remunerated among them, who could afford private motor-cars and patronise the expensive restaurants and occupy the stalls and boxes at the theatres. These were the aristocrats of the nation in the true, if not in the best sense of the word. These were the only people whom the proletariat could now designate "toffs."

As Anymoon looked back upon the incidents of the Great Upheaval the thing that amazed him most was the extraordinary supineness and torpidity with which the erstwhile ruling-classes had acquiesced in their own undoing. Without an attempt at resistance they had piled their arms immediately and had marched between the Caudine Forks like lambs. Had they chosen to resist at the onset there was little doubt that their expropriation might have been procrastinated, or at least mitigated, indefinitely. But there was no unanimity amongst them. A strange mentality, known to modern jargon as the

"Twentieth-century Conscience," had influenced a vast number to encourage the State to thrust its hand deeper and deeper into their pockets. Some of these seemed to take an absolute pleasure in being garrotted and having their purses stolen. They welcomed the process of "levelling-down," because they were told that opposition would be "reactionary," without convincing themselves that the result of the operation would be a general "levelling-up," effectual and permanent. Some of the most opulent had coquetted with the Socialists in the hope that they would be the last to be eaten.

Now, many a good, easy man, who had previously dubbed himself "a bit of a Socialist," was beginning to believe that he had been more than "a bit of a fool." An iron-handed D.O.R.A., infinitely more inexorable and exasperating than that which had fettered the liberties and curtailed the pleasures of the whole people during the long nightmare of the Great War, seemed now to be established absolutely and for all time. Although in theory the "Brotherhood of Man" had been supposed to signify universal liberty, in practice it had involved a general diminution of personal freedom, for the State was now all in all and the individual naught. Nor was it only the old upper and middle classes who felt the effects of the new tyranny. The working-man, although in many cases, but by no means in all, his standard of comfort had been raised by the fixed wage of a pound a day, was no longer a free agent. With the extinction of the Trade Union his right of combination and his privilege to select his own particular handicraft had disappeared. The power of readjusting the National Service as necessity demanded rested with the Egyptians. A London bricklayer might be turned into a Manchester paper-hanger if the Commonwealth willed it so. As a general rule, however, the task-masters tyrannised only over the old bourgeoisie.

As Anymoon looked upon the results of the Great Upheaval he beheld discontent and anger everywhere. But the cry of the people "by reason of their task-

masters" did not dismay him, for he contemplated a period, in the not far distant future, when a splendid public spirit would arise and every man would labour his hardest in the service of the State without supervision or compulsion. Anymoon had always been a man of great faith.

II

A FEW days after his dramatic appearance on the roof of Buckingham Palace Anymoon and his wife paid a visit to one of the great public schools in the neighbourhood of London to see Mrs. Anymoon's only nephew, who was a pupil there. Grace Dalrymple, who had lately become a great favourite with the President's lady, accompanied the pair at Mrs. Anymoon's special request, and Anymoon also, always exhilarated by the presence of a pretty girl, was glad to have her with them.

They walked from the station though it was a warm day, for Mrs. Anymoon, notwithstanding her plumpness and placidity, never missed an opportunity of taking exercise. She was dressed appropriately, if not altogether becomingly, in a white cloth coat and skirt, with green silk embroidery, and a wide-brimmed straw hat. But in the eyes of her adoring husband she always showed the best of taste, and as he gazed beneath her sunshade upon her serene, regular features and observed the radiant light that was dancing in her eyes at the prospect of meeting a boy she loved, he reflected proudly that his wife was one of the most attractive and companionable of women. Occasionally, too, he stole an appreciative glance at the tall, handsome girl who walked by her side, and felt grateful to Providence that there were such beautiful creatures in the world. Like many great men Anymoon was always humble and deferential in his attitude towards women.

The President's visit had been unannounced and his

unexpected appearance astonished only the few who recognised him. He wore the familiar light-grey frock-coat and trousers, with a tall grey hat, but it was not until they were strolling down the High Street that anyone in an official position came to welcome them. Then, as they were passing the Head Master's house, a jerky little man with fluffy side-whiskers and spectacles bounced out of the front door into the roadway.

"Mr. President," he gurgled, doffing a cloth cap, and showing a mouthful of yellow, sprawling teeth, "if we 'ad only known that you were coming! . . . I should 'ave been on the platform to meet you. . . . I 'ave only just been told by the school sergeant that you were walking up the street."

"It is an incognito visit, Mr. Horridge," responded Anymoon, with a regal smile, and he presented the Head Master to his companions.

Grace gazed in amazement at the pedagogue. She had heard that such things had come into existence with the Great Upheaval, but the reality surpassed her wildest imaginings. Yet Mr. Horridge, who had been the most brilliant boy of his year at the Manchester Grammar School, was a supreme scholar, having been bracketed third in the Classical Tripos and having won several of the most coveted prizes at Cambridge. But such as he, hitherto, never had controlled the destinies of a great public school.

"You'll find your nephew on the cricket ground," continued Mr. Horridge, brandishing his teeth at Mrs. Anymoon. "We still play that reactionary game, though I 'ope to substitute base-ball, which 'as the advantage of being modern and looking more democratic. . . . But let me show you round the place. . . . Come and see the chapel."

Mr. Horridge did not trouble to remove his deer-stalker cap when they entered the venerable place of worship.

"We've secularised all this," he explained, jerking his arm disdainfully towards the fretted roof. "At morning service we sing a 'ymn and read a chapter from the

Bible. . . . And on Sundays there's a lecture. . . . We 'urt the susceptibilities of no denomination nowadays."

"Then you have no religious teaching?" exclaimed Grace, with reproachful grey eyes.

"That's the business of the parents, miss," replied Mr. Horridge, with a self-conscious wriggle.

"Unhappily, all their sense of responsibility is being destroyed," sighed Grace.

"Yes, that's the spirit of the age," agreed Mr. Horridge, hoping to make a favourable impression upon the pretty girl. "Eventually the family 'll cease to be the elementary group, for it's incompatible with perfect equality. . . . We must move with the times."

"Surely Communism must continue to preserve the home?" demanded Mrs. Anymoon, with a mischievous smile. "Nearly all its prophets have promised us that."

"'Ow can we 'ave uniformity if one man 'as a dozen babies and another only two?" replied Mr. Horridge, winking at Anymoon. "It may be all right for a while, but it's bound to cause ructions at the finish . . . eh, Mr. President?"

"I think human ingenuity will find a way out of the difficulty," replied Anymoon pompously.

"Oh, but we're vastly conservative in some things," said the Head Master, with a deprecatory glance around the beautiful old chapel. "Look at all those memorial tablets. . . . We've kept them just as they are, though every one of 'em's an emblem of wicked militarism."

"Wouldn't it be more correct to say that they commemorate gallant men who fought and died for liberty?" said Mrs. Anymoon, with quiet sarcasm.

"It was their nature to," sneered Mr. Horridge. "It's good for liberty that they should 'ave been put out of the way."

They got rid of the Head Master at last and strolled along to the cricket ground, where they discovered the Anymoon nephew, a rosy and stalwart boy of eighteen, who had just finished a brilliant innings in a sides-game. He was the son of a soldier who had fallen in the Great

War, and although, owing to his traditions, he had little sympathy politically with his famous uncle he was proud of him nevertheless.

"Surprised to see me, Douglas?" said Anymoon, with an affectionate greeting. "I've not lost interest in you, old man, though I haven't been able to come to the school before."

"I'm glad you're here at last, sir," answered the boy cheerily. "I wanted a talk with you badly."

And he led the way to a seat under the trees near the pavilion.

"Things have changed, Douglas, since you came here first," said Mrs. Anymoon, with a sigh, as they all sat down together.

"The school has gone to pot," replied the nephew uncompromisingly.

"Is your Head Master popular with the boys?" inquired Grace, with a cynical little inflection, beaming at him.

He smiled back at her, perceiving instantly with boyish appreciation that she was a kindred spirit as well as a pretty girl.

"He's a hopeless blighter," he answered scornfully.

"Oh, come, come," protested Anymoon. "His record is a fine one."

"He's an absolute rotter," persisted Douglas. "To begin with, every master he's appointed comes from a Board-school—bounders almost worse than himself."

"In the modern scheme of education there can be no class distinctions," drawled Mrs. Anymoon, with a roguish smile at her husband. "I've quoted the formula correctly, haven't I, my dear?"

"Well, it's rough on the English language, that's all I can say," retorted Douglas. "It's this sort of thing that's made the Colonial lingo what it is. . . . If we're all to talk alike we might fix a decent standard."

"That's a point worth remembering," said the intelligent Mrs. Anymoon. "You might pass a law, Joseph, to punish the debasers of the common tongue as well as those who pass false coin."

"You're a hopeless reactionary, my dear," replied Anymoon, remembering nevertheless his successful struggles to extirpate his Cockney accent. "Well, Douglas," he continued, "have you any other grievance against the Head?"

For a moment the boy was intent upon the game of cricket.

"Shot, sir!" he shouted appreciatively, as a youthful batsman, opening his shoulders, made a lusty drive past point to the boundary.

Then he turned to the President with an apologetic smile.

"Yes, uncle," he answered emphatically, "he has abolished swishing."

Anymoon chuckled.

"Surely the boys oughn't to complain of that?"

Douglas gave him a pitying glance.

"He can jolly well do what he pleases himself. . . . That wouldn't matter a hang if he didn't interfere with our privileges."

The boy laid his hand on Anymoon's arm. He was as pre-eminent in scholarship as in games, and consequently, like every youth of his age and standard, he was gifted with more than average intelligence.

"Look here, uncle," he continued, "you don't seem to understand that the essence of the old public-school system was the rule of boys by boys. . . . It was an example of perfect Communism, for everyone was satisfied."

Anymoon brightened up.

"The Commonwealth is based on the same principle. . . . The industrial community conducts its own affairs, and the Government departments, like benevolent schoolmasters, will merely supervise."

"Well, our little show was jolly well managed when I came here first," said Douglas, with a regretful sigh. "The Head of a House could whack anyone that needed it. . . . A boy had to learn to obey and then perhaps he was fit to command. We all had to go through the mill in turn. . . . *Our* government was an efficient one."

"But now your Head Master wants to do it all by kindness," observed Mrs. Anymoon thoughtfully.

"That's bilge," retorted Douglas, with schoolboy directness, "and because it isn't natural it isn't right. . . . There was one good thing about the old school, at any rate. Everyone who needed a sloshing got it. . . . Now they're all unlicked cubs. . . . We can't even fag them."

"Your Head Master, like other social reformers, hopes to maintain discipline through an entire change in human nature," said Mrs. Anymoon, with another glance at her husband.

"Meanwhile there must be penalties for digressions," replied Anymoon hastily. "Everyone acknowledges that."

"Then why not let us do a bit of whacking now and then?" retorted Douglas truculently.

"Since your uncle has just acknowledged that discipline is not incompatible with equality," added Grace, with a smile.

"He needn't be afraid of trusting us, Miss Dalrymple," answered the boy, giving her a look of gratitude. "We're pretty good judges of our own kind."

Anymoon made no response, but his eyes wandered dreamily over the landscape and he seemed lost in reverie.

Presently, there was a high-pitched little chuckle from behind and Mr. Horridge came bustling up at the back of their seat.

"If you come 'ere next summer, ladies," he prattled, pointing across the cricket ground, "you will find girls participating in our games."

"Ah, yes," said Anymoon, awaking from his reflections. "The Co-education Act should be in full operation long before then."

Douglas groaned audibly, while Grace stole a sympathetic glance at him.

"You don't seem to like the prospect?" she whispered.

"It'll be Hades," he answered *sotto voce*. "Good egg, I'm leaving this term."

"I don't understand, Mr. Horridge," observed Mrs. Anymoon languidly but insistent. "Do you mean to say that the girls will take part in the boys' games on equal terms?"

"Not exactly," chirped Mr. Horridge, with a jerk and a grin. "We'll rate them on their merits. . . . Still, I've no doubt there'll be lots of them in the first Eleven."

"Nice job for the captain!" Grace whispered to Douglas.

"Probably the game of cricket will 'ave to be revolutionised to suit modern requirements," continued Mr. Horridge complacently. "We shall 'ave to apply the law of Equivalent Compensation, as the good Mrs. Rhyle would say. . . . In other words, we shall 'ave to introduce a system of handicaps."

"Yes, sir, hobble the best bats and let all the rabbits have two innings," interpolated Douglas, who stood in no awe of the Head Master.

"And hamstring the best bowlers," added Mrs. Anymoon.

"The game is too selfish and individualistic," replied Mr. Horridge. "Personally I don't think a socialist community ought to tolerate it. . . . When all's said and done it admits of no equality."

"What sport does?" demanded Douglas indignantly.

"Cricket's the worst of the lot," retorted Mr. Horridge. "It makes for bad citizenship that one man should be able to keep eleven others running about a field for 'im all afternoon."

"Yes, the girls will get tired of that," said Mrs. Anymoon cynically. "Unless, of course, he's very good-looking."

"I fear that you 'aven't much sympathy with the principle of Co-education, Mrs. President," replied Mr. Horridge, bending over her insinuatingly.

"I don't make a fetish of it," answered Mrs. Anymoon, with a stifled yawn, "but I'm prepared to give it a trial."

"It will make boys into milk-sops and girls into hoydens," said Grace emphatically.

Later, when they were strolling back to the railway tation after tea with Douglas at the hotel, Anymoon 'as still distrait and reflective.

"I wonder whether the boy is right," he exclaimed t length abruptly.

"About cricket?" said Mrs. Anymoon lazily.

"No! . . . When he suggested that the chief glory of the old public-school education was that every boy who wanted licking into shape got it. . . . It means a great deal, if it's true."

"Of course it's true," answered Grace quickly.

Anymoon remained buried in thought for several moments, caressing the wart upon his cheek lovingly. Presently, he spoke again.

"Perhaps this is the solution of all our difficulties. . . . A universal system of education under which boys rule boys. . . . Why shouldn't this bring about the change in human nature?"

Grace looked up at him eagerly.

"You mean that if the old Board-schools had been run on public-school lines we should have produced the esprit de corps of good citizenship?"

As Anymoon gazed at the girl, whose graceful figure was outlined, strong and lissom, in her white muslin frock, and marked the serene grey depths of her honest eyes, the thought struck him that all that was needed to regenerate the human species was a race of mothers like unto her.

"With all his narrowness and class prejudices the old public-school boy was a fine fellow," he observed gravely, taking off his hat and mopping his dome-like brow. "He saved the nation from the Hun. . . . I am not sure that it would not be well to bring up all our boys like him."

"Boys, yes, but what about girls?" demanded his wife. "Your Co-education Act would have to go. . . . I don't see how girls would fit in with the rule of boys. . . . Remember what Douglas said about whacking!"

"However," she added, a moment later, "you will be

able to discuss the matter with him again in August. . . . I've asked him to spend the first week of his holidays with us."

III

RUIN had fallen upon the Thring establishment in Grosvenor Square. When his *rentes* were confiscated Thring had been prepared to carry on with the income of £5000 a year which he still received as a Councillor of State. But at the annual election in the first week in July he had lost his seat on the National Council unexpectedly, being supplanted by a woman, who was a disciple of the uncompromising Mrs. Rhyle, and, like many thousand unhappy *rentiers*, he was compelled to break up his house and home.

He stood at the window of his dining-room, gazing stoically out upon the trees in the garden, where the summer sunshine was sparkling amidst the green leaves, a stately and venerable figure, unbowed by the storm that had swept upon him. His white head was still held proudly, and his handsome old face, with its fierce, hooked nose and firm, resolute lips, was as brave and inscrutable as ever. A *grand seigneur* of the old régime, it was impossible for him to play the part of the craven.

Moreover, he realised that he was reaping as he had sown. He had elected long ago to throw in his lot with the party of progress and he was aware that he had helped to feather the arrow that had struck him down. He felt that it would ill become him to repine when countless others, who had had no part or lot in bringing about the cataclysm, were enduring their martyrdom with fortitude. The last enactments of Democracy were utterly repugnant to him, and in his opinion the State seemed to be marching towards chaos and anarchy. But he was wholly impotent now. His sole vestige of power had been

swept away. They had taken everything from him except his stout old heart.

Two large vans were standing in front of the house, into which some Government employees were placing his wonderful old furniture. It was to be carried off to one of the National repositories to be apportioned hereafter, as the officials might decide, amongst those in want of it. He was allowed to keep enough only to furnish the small flat which was to be his future home, for no one whose effects had been included in the universal valuation two years previously might now retain more than a thousand pounds' worth of their *lares* and *penates*. In consequence of this rationing the choicest specimens of the workmanship of the old cabinet-makers were thrown upon the market in vast quantities at low prices, and the fortunate people with large salaries were able to secure many splendid bargains. But although the Government soon perceived that it was robbing Peter to pay Paul, it appeared unable to invent a device for putting an end to the anomaly.

Thring's keen eyes glittered with sardonic glee, as he thought of the trouble that the Government was preparing for itself when the nation should next insist upon another general dividing-up of things, and he began to watch the despoiling of his house almost with interest. The east wind was sweeping little eddies of dust past the windows, and the flock of sparrows, sporting amongst the straw on the pavement, flew off helter-skelter as the furniture-removers tramped down upon them in their marches from the front door to the van. An English marquetry clock had just been stowed away, followed by a sixteenth-century suit of equestrian armour, and the men were now carrying a heavy case, which contained, as Thring knew, a priceless collection of Sèvres porcelain.

"That'll all be bought by some damned official for an old song," he muttered. "But they'll have it out of him again in a few months."

There was a footfall on the soft Axminster carpet, and Parker, the butler, stood behind him.

"They can't make us share and share alike," cried Thring exultantly. "They strip me and enrich someone else. . . . And so it must be till they abolish money and ration everything. . . . You perceive their dilemma, Parker?"

The clear-cut features of the tall butler, who was standing as rigid as a soldier on parade, wore an expression of the deepest melancholy.

"It's a mournful spectacle, my lord," he answered in a low voice. "I never thought I'd live to see such a day."

"But you were fighting the Huns for four years, Parker. . . . You must have seen worse scenes of plunder out in Flanders."

"They didn't come home to me like this, my lord. . . . I've been in your lordship's service since I entered it as steward's-room boy when I was fourteen."

Thring gave a fierce crow of derision.

"Well, this is the end of the chapter," he exclaimed petulantly.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Parker tremulously. "But if it is possible I should like to continue to attend your lordship . . . even if it were merely in the capacity of valet."

Thring responded with an uproarious laugh.

"Good God, man, I shan't need a valet."

Parker inclined his head respectfully.

"Excuse me, my lord, but I was thinking of myself. . . . I'm forty years old, and though I can rough it with the best I've no inclination to be turned into a bricklayer or a navvy. . . . Now in your new appointment——"

"They've made me Purveyor of the Navy, Parker . . . a sort of glorified house-steward, with a salary of five hundred, to supervise the stores and commissariat."

"You would find me very useful as your secretary, my lord. . . . With all respect, I think I understand these things better than your lordship."

There was a gleam of mischief in Thring's fierce old eyes.

"Jove, that's a capital notion, Parker, and I've no doubt that I can get President Anymoon to agree. . . . He's not ungrateful to his old friends."

"And there's a little spare room in your new flat, my lord," continued Parker eagerly. "I should be very useful to you, my lord, in every way."

Thring continued to chuckle to himself softly when his servant had retired.

"I'll suggest to Anymoon that he puts us both into naval uniform," he muttered. "Parker would look like an admiral. . . . It's good to have some levelling-up amidst all this levelling-down. . . . And, by George, I shall be about the only man in the cursed land who has a valet."

Meanwhile, Grace was sitting with Father Oldfield in the morning-room, which had not yet been dismantled of its beautiful furniture. She too was leaving the house the same day, and since she would no longer be able to live with her uncle, her friend, Mrs. Anymoon, had offered her a suite of apartments in St. James's Palace.

"The rooms are vacant, my dear, and you are an official of consequence," the autocratic lady had remarked serenely. "Besides, what's the good of having power unless one can accommodate one's friends?"

And Grace had accepted the proposal with gratitude.

Father Oldfield, one of the shining lights of Catholicism in England by reason of his lofty eloquence and audacious courage, was a tall, lean man, with a rosy, rugged face, the texture of which resembled red gutta-percha. He had glistening brown eyes and a perpetual smile.

"You must get married, my daughter," he had insisted many times during the interview, rubbing his slender hands. "Whatever befalls, that is the *métier* of all good Catholics. . . . The Holy Church has need of children . . . more so now than at any period in her history."

Grace had lowered her head despondingly.

"I have not the courage," she murmured.

"Courage!" cried the priest in a ringing voice. "It is not courage that is needful . . . it is faith. . . . Why do you lack courage?"

"Because there is unrest everywhere," she answered humbly. "Everything is being thrown into the melting-pot."

"Except our immortal souls," he exclaimed. "They are being tried by the fire and they will shine all the more splendidly after the ordeal. . . . It is just that we should be afflicted. . . . It is good that the children of the earth shall suffer."

"You are always hopeful, Father," she responded.

"Because I know that a better and a wiser and a cleaner world will be built upon the ruins of the old. . . . Because I look forward to the time when our Holy Church will rule the hearts of all mankind."

"So far we seem to be plunged deeper in schism," she replied. "Every man is free to do what he considers right in his own eyes."

"Schism! . . . I welcome it. . . . It is a mere transitory phase. . . . The greater the schism and the sooner the true Christ will prevail. . . . I look forward to the day when the whole of society will be based on a confederation of religious communities—Guilds of zealous workmen, inspired and helped and controlled by our Holy Church, each labouring unselfishly for the good of all—exalted Trade Unions, children of the light, into whose hands every means of production has been consigned. . . . Work and prayer, work and prayer! Let no man henceforth ever seek to put them asunder."

"I wish I could have your faith, Father," said Grace, with a sigh. "I am full of misgivings."

"It must come and it shall," he cried ecstatically. "The glory of our Holy Church will permeate the whole social organisation. . . . It will be the inspiration of every act of life. . . . A man will labour because the spirit of God is in his heart. . . . We shall all be in one precious fold. . . . I welcome those who would put an end to government. We need no government and we

need no laws. . . . We shall always have our Holy Church . . . and man wants no more."

"Councillor Cohen agrees with you up to a point, Father," said Grace timidly. "He wishes to establish trade communities, but he is the declared enemy of Catholicism."

"I welcome him," roared the priest, his gutta-percha features wreathed in smiles. "I welcome all those who will go a step further in reform, be they Jews, Heathens or Mahomedans. . . . It is not for them to decide to what extent the process of evolution shall go. . . . The power will soon be snatched from their hands. . . . They are merely the instruments of a passing phase. . . . But no force on earth can hinder the apotheosis of our Holy Church, when man shall become a fellow-workman with his God. . . . I stand for Christian Socialism!"

Grace's conversation with Father Oldfield had one important result, for she wrote to Kenneth Darell the same evening to tell him that she was willing to marry him in a month's time.

IV

A FEW nights later the rebellious Cohen was sitting in the dining-room of his house in Berkeley Square with his two fire-brand disciples, Kinreck and Larcey. The apartment was a spacious one and had been handsomely furnished originally, but both the room and its contents had deteriorated greatly during the occupation of its present owner. There were stains and tatters on the walls and on the upholstery, and dust lay thickly everywhere. Upon the mahogany table, scored with dents and scratches, stood a bottle of gin and a jug of water, and the three kindred spirits with their chairs drawn up around it were drinking and smoking as they talked.

"Did you read Father Oldfield's last speech?" demanded Kinreck, with a toss of his tow-like hair,

addressing Cohen. "I hope you're proud of your latest convert."

The Jew's eye glittered sardonically beneath his shaggy brow.

"Words, words," he growled, clawing at his black beard. "He is a talking machine, nothing more. . . . But if he supports me I am well content. . . . The man has followers."

A smile of derision stole over Larcey's sharp, vitriolic features.

"He welcomes you in the name of Christian Socialism," he observed. "He thinks to use you as a kind of stepping-stone. . . . Isn't it priceless?"

Cohen flung a guttural guffaw through his unkempt beard and filled his tumbler half-full of gin. Then, observing that the bottle was empty, he pressed his boot upon the electric bell beneath the table.

"Fool!" he muttered fiercely. "To think that religion can ever rule the world again. . . . Religion! . . . For centuries it has made men slaves."

Presently, a tall, slatternly Jewess with truculent black eyes burst unceremoniously into the room, in answer to the bell.

"Another bottle of schnapps, Eliza," said Cohen, without glancing at her.

"There y'are," she cried, banging a bottle upon the table. "I knoo what yer wanted. . . . But don't git drunk, for I'm gying aht and yer'll have to git yerself to bed if yer do."

And she marched away, banging the door behind her.

"Well, what's to be the next move against Old Noll?" demanded Larcey, helping himself from the new bottle.

Cohen combed his beard angrily with his claw-like fingers for a few moments before he spoke.

"I forced his hand," he muttered fiercely. "I made him obey . . . and it was wormwood to him."

"But you cut no ice," answered Kinreck, blowing a cloud of smoke to the ceiling. "He's still where he is, and he'll need a deal of shifting."

"He's a crafty devil," said Larcey, biting his thin, cruel lips. "He stole our trump card when he made the social organisation an industrial one at first. . . . It was a clever idea to federate the groups of workers under the rule of local Communes. . . . It cut the ground from under our feet everywhere."

"No," cried Cohen, his hoarse voice swelling into shrill vociferation. "It did not. . . . The State is his fetish. . . . I join issue with him on the first principle. . . . To hell with central government. . . . The Trade Unions must possess the entire trade ownership and control . . . every group must be the complete master in its own house."

"Oldfield's with us there," observed Larcey cynically. "But he looks to his Church to supply the driving-power."

"Bah!" retorted Cohen, taking his long pipe from his lips. "The only tie that can bind us all together is the Brotherhood of Man. . . . Nothing else can prevail . . . nothing else shall."

"But you're up against Anymoon all the time, old sportsman," said Kinreck, with a snarl, "and you'll find him a nut to crack."

Springing abruptly to his feet, tall and sinister, Larcey smote his fist fiercely upon the table.

> ". . . . Let every tyrant feel
> The deep keen searching of a patriot's steel,"

he chanted menacingly.

"Aye," agreed Kinreck. "That is the only way."

"If you've got the pluck, Cohen," continued Larcey, leaning across the table, his sharp, parchment-like features gleaming with enthusiasm. "If you only dare to carry it through."

The Jew's eyes glowed with an angry light.

"What do you mean?" he demanded thickly, through his shaggy beard.

Larcey sat down, his thin lips curling into a cruel smile.

"You've got to put the President away," he answered coldly, "or he'll crush you instead."

Cohen clawed at his beard, muttering to himself incoherently. A tremor passed through his fragile form.

"How could it be done?" he babbled at last querulously. "Who could do it? . . . The people are fond of him——"

"The people are mere sheep," said Larcey contemptuously. "They follow any man who knows how to lead them."

Cohen thrust a bony hand across the table.

"You mean assassination?" he murmured.

"Execution," returned Larcey calmly. "It is a fitter word."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders and a gleam of courage stole into his glittering eyes.

"If I had friends who would dare," he muttered, drawing himself up in his chair, "they would find me resolute enough."

"You may reckon me a friend," replied Larcey significantly.

"And me," added Kinreck, with a flush in his hollow cheeks.

Cohen glared from one to the other with fierce inquisitiveness.

"You mean it?" he demanded, drawing a deep breath.

"We're your disciples," replied Larcey cynically. "In your speech in Trafalgar Square you proclaimed death to tyrants."

Cohen nodded his head slowly, the light gleaming more brightly in his eyes.

"You'll face the risk?" he said presently, turning eagerly to Larcey.

"Aye," said Larcey contemptuously, "it's no longer a hanging matter."

Cohen leant across the table and his fellow-conspirators lowered their heads attentively.

"The day that man breathes his last I'll overthrow the Council and proclaim a Federation of Labour," he

observed earnestly, "and I'll not forget those that helped me to crush the tyrant."

"When you step into his shoes," muttered the sinister Larcey.

"When I proclaim the dawn of Liberty," replied Cohen, extending his arms with rapture.

"Well, what's the method?" demanded Kinreck. "Knife or bullet?"

Draining his glass, Cohen helped himself again from the bottle with a trembling hand.

"I have a friend in Whitechapel," he murmured hoarsely, "who'd make bomb or clock-machine. . . . We can put an end to the tyrant and the tyrant's friends with one blow."

"At a meeting of the Council," suggested Kinreck savagely.

"At the marriage of their protégée next month," cried Cohen, with a burst of fanaticism.

Slipping his hand into his pocket, Larcey drew forth a long dagger, which he snatched from its scabbard. Slowly rising from his chair, he brandished the weapon above his head.

"I've pondered over this job long and anxiously, mates," he exclaimed, with flaming eyes, "and I'll see it through whether or not you get your bombs or machinery. . . . I look to you, Cohen, to gain me admittance into the Palace and then I'll fend for myself. . . . Meantime I can find out the lie of the place and learn his habits. . . . A bit of steel's surer than your machines any day."

"We could try one first," said Kinreck, with a sparkle in his weary eyes.

"And put 'em on their guard if it didn't do its work," sneered Larcey. "No, I prefer first innings."

"But we'll have the machine ready in case you fail," said Cohen, with his fingers in his beard.

"I'll not fail you," cried Larcey, holding his knife aloft.

V

Cyril and Betty, unlike their friends, were married on the day originally fixed, the wedding taking place at a registry office in Manchester during the first week in July. They made their home in the young man's bachelor abode, a light and airy suite of four rooms at the top of a large block of service flats in one of the southern suburbs. One elderly maid-of-all-work—for no domestic servants were young now—who spent eight hours of each day in their employ, more than fulfilled all their wants, as their little *appartement*, with its wood-block flooring and central heating, could be kept in order with a minimum of labour.

Stoic, like his father, the ex-Guardsman did not indulge in futile yearnings for the past. Although his duties were distasteful he performed them with zeal and efficiency, and though he had few congenial friends he found sufficient recreation on the cricket field and in the tennis court. But in a great measure his persistent cheerfulness was inspired by the belief that the present order of things could not endure and that brighter days were in store for him.

Now, with the companionship of a merry wife, in spite of everything he was happier than he had ever been before, even in his boyhood when he was the pampered heir to an immense rent-roll and to a proud title. His salary was a thousand pounds a year, and as Betty had secured a lucrative post in a local Government store, where she acted as matron over the girl-employees, they were comparatively rich. It was by no means the life for which his upbringing had fitted him, but since there was no alternative he was too little of the visionary to quarrel with his environment.

On the same evening that Cohen and his friends were hatching their conspiracy of murder the newly-married pair were sitting together after dinner in their little flat.

Although there was a communal restaurant in the building they preferred to dine in their own rooms, and Betty, with the aid of her charwoman and an electric stove, was always able to provide a recherché repast. The servant had just cleared away and Cyril was enjoying a glass of port-wine and a cigar.

"How is it that everything is going up?" suddenly inquired Betty. "The price of fish is simply fabulous."

She was dressed in a pink chiffon frock, and her bare arms and shoulders shone enticingly in the gleam of the shaded lamp as she sat with her elbows on the table, puffing a cigarette.

"The fishermen get a standard wage," answered Cyril. "It makes no odds to them whether they catch much or little."

"And if they catch less we have to pay more?"

"Exactly. It's a case of supply and demand."

Her laughing brown eyes grew grave and her ripe lips were gathered in a pout.

"But if things go up and up and up?"

He laughed carelessly, knocking the ash from his cigar.

"People will have to pay the price or do without."

Betty wrinkled her brows petulantly.

"And will things go on going up?" she demanded.

"Certainly," he answered, "if we continue to produce less."

"What will happen then?" she asked in wonder.

"The nation will be worse off," he replied. "There will be less to go round. No one is allowed to work more than thirty-two hours a week."

"But people mayn't be able to afford to pay the high prices."

"Then they will want their wages raised."

"That will make things dearer still."

"Of course, we shall be living in a sort of vicious circle."

She gave a little gasp of dismay.

"And isn't there a remedy?"

"In the old days things were regulated by competition. . . . Then, if you and I each had a trawler we should try to catch as many fish as we could for the sake of the profit and this would help to keep the price down."

Betty thrust out her round arms with a gesture of despair.

"I think everything is absolutely horrid," she cried, with emphasis.

"In the end, I suppose we shall have fixed prices and a system of rationing," continued Cyril, moving over to an arm-chair. "It's the only solution. . . . The producer isn't subject to competition any more, so it isn't fair that there should be competition among the buyers."

"You mean that if the fisherman gets good wages the public ought to have plenty of fish."

"The State will have to interfere more and more. . . . It will have to penalise the lazy workman, which will be difficult, and it will have to suppress the greedy buyer, which will be impossible."

"Unless, of course, it abolishes money altogether," she suggested.

"Exactly," he replied, with a nod. "That will be the only way to put an end to competition entirely. . . . We shall all have to carry about coupons again and for ever."

"Oh, my goodness!" groaned Betty.

"Otherwise, the buyers will bid against one another," he continued, "and so there will still be competition."

"Why should one be afraid of competition?"

"It became unpopular."

"But it made people work?"

"Yes, it certainly did that."

"And it made things cheap?"

"Yes, and good!"

"And everybody reaped as they sowed."

"Which was just."

"Then why, oh why did we ever give it up?" she cried, standing in front of his chair, with her hands clasped behind her waist and a perplexed frown upon her brow.

He drew her down upon his knees and stroked her soft white shoulder.

"Because the majority chose to become brigands," he said contemptuously, "and even if they were morally justified events are proving that it was an act of folly. . . . The last state of the nation will be a thousand times worse than the first."

She laid her hand over his mouth protestingly.

"Don't let's talk any more about the stupid old nation," she whispered, kissing him on the brow.

"Right-o. . . . Suggest something interesting to talk about."

"Ourselves!"

He laughed gaily, slapping her playfully on the arm.

"Rather. . . . Well, I think we've got a very jolly little home."

She gazed around the room critically. Its colours and furniture were certainly in very good taste.

"Yes," she answered reluctantly, "I suppose it's fairly decent for these days. . . . Of course, it's very small."

He jumped to his feet and passed his arm around her waist.

"Come into the other room and give me some music."

Scarcely had she sat down at the piano, however, when the bell in the vestibule began to ring insistently, and when Cyril, with muttered imprecations, flung open the front door he found Hothersall, the Member of Council for Lancashire, standing outside. With a curt nod the visitor strode down the little passage, bluff and ebullient, and pushed his way unceremoniously into the sitting-room.

"Beg pardon, mum," he said, brusquely apologetic at the sight of Betty, snatching the bowler hat from the back of his head. "I've come to see your good man. . . . Cosy little nest you've got here," he added, looking around.

"Very different to your home, Mr. Hothersall," said Betty, shaking hands submissively, with an apprehensive glance at the aggressive, bearded face.

"Yes, I haven't got a bad shop," answered the statesman, balancing himself on the arm of a chair. . . . "Look here, Thring," he continued abruptly, turning to Cyril, who had followed him into the room. "My car's being repaired . . . I want you to let me come round with you in the morning in your run-about. . . . I mun see how things have been shaping since I were here last."

"I've to be in the Bolton district to-morrow," answered Cyril.

"That'll suit me to a T'," said Hothersall. "Well, lad, I suppose you've heard the latest? Th' miners are all out on strike and we're going to have a job with them, I can tell you."

"What's the grievance?" inquired Cyril carelessly.

"Wages, of course . . . a pound a day's not enough for them. . . . They only reckon to go down t' pit four times a week and that makes 'em less than th' rest o' chaps are getting up above. . . . There's summat in what they say and a'. . . . It's cruel wark is coal-mining."

"Then you're going to support their demand?"

Hothersall sank heavily into the arm-chair and scratched his brown beard reflectively.

"They're a powerful lot and one's like to side wi' the majority. . . . But it'll play the hangment if we've got to double their pay, which is what they're after."

"Things will get dearer than ever," sighed Betty.

Hothersall's keen brown eyes flashed an admiring glance at her.

"Aye, mum, that's the trouble," he answered, striking his hard fist into the palm of his hand. "Other chaps 'll want a rise too. . . . There'll be nowt left o' the Lancashire shipping trade in a bit. . . . Foreigners won't go on paying us any sort of price for our goods we like to ask. . . . It's not in reason."

"You saw the returns for the last five months?" said Cyril. "Imports are down twenty-five per cent, and exports——"

"Don't rub it in, mon," retorted Hothersall dismally.

"I had it all over with Anymoon for three blessed hours yesterday. . . . I gave him some pretty stiff advice."

"What was it?"

Hothersall sprang to his feet with clenched fingers, thrusting out his bearded chin combatively.

"Why . . . to appeal to the country and have a General Election of the Communes——"

"But a third have just been elected——"

"That makes no odds. . . . The President can force a General Election. . . . It's provided for in the Constitution to meet a special crisis. . . . And it's high time he strengthened his position."

"Supposing he's beaten?"

"He'll noan be beaten. Anymoon was never more popular than he is now. . . . And he'd have the support of the women."

"If the women get into power you'll find that they're far more autocratic," interposed Betty, shaking her head admonishingly.

"You're about right there," said Hothersall, with another appreciative glance at her bright, animated face. "Anymoon 'll have to strengthen the central government all t' same. . . . There's too much local option for my fancy."

Cyril smiled mischievously.

"You mustn't be reactionary, Hothersall," he remarked. "Decentralisation is the very basis of Communism."

"Aye," replied the Councillor. "Providing there's a central power to keep all the little parts in order."

"I don't see how you're going to alter things," observed Betty tartly. "The people want to do less work and have higher wages. . . . It's only natural."

"And they expect the State to stand the racket," thundered Hothersall wrathfully. "I'm an efficient man myself, mum, and I'd like to make everyone efficient likewise. . . . Consequently, I reckon it's about high time the Government asserted itself."

"I hope you'll succeed," said Betty fervently.

"In the old days I was an out-and-out Socialist from

the start," continued Hothersall. "I were never one of those dateless Syndicalists. . . . I'm a believer in discipline."

"Well, there were always those two schools," said Cyril reflectively. "It will be interesting to see which prevails."

"My lot will and be hanged to you," retorted Hothersall, with North-country candour. "And I'll tell you what, my lad, if you'll ask me to have a glass of whisky-and-water I don't know as I'd say 'No thank you.' . . . When I was in London, mum," he continued, turning to Betty, "I heard tell that your friend, Miss Dalrymple, was thinking of getting wed, and a bonny young bride she'll make."

"Yes," said Betty, with sparkling eyes, "I'm delighted."

VI

At eight o'clock on the following morning, when Cyril drove round to Hothersall's spacious villa, which was only half a mile from his own house, he found the Councillor in his dining-room, gloating over a beautiful Sheraton sideboard which he had purchased recently.

"That's the sort of stuff to buy," he cried, with enthusiasm; "that's how I spend my money. . . . In time every stick of furniture in the house 'll be a show piece."

"They'll take it from you just as they took my father's," replied Cyril dryly.

"He'd the bad luck to be caught by the National valuation two years back," said Hothersall pompously. "I'd not begun to draw my salary then. . . . I've sunk eight thousand pounds in antiques since. . . . Good Lorjus days, it's the only investment left."

"But it doesn't return any interest," answered Cyril.

"Gammon," retorted Hothersall. "D'you think I let it lie idle? . . . Anyone as takes a fancy to a piece can

have it at a price. . . . I'm turning it over all the time. . . . Some of the biggest millionaires in America's my customers."

"They'll prohibit the export before long."

"I'll be bound they will, but when that's in the wind I shall hear as soon as any and I'll take care to clear out in time. . . . And take my tip, Thring, if you've ever a bit of spare cash lock it up in one of the New York banks. . . . It'd come in useful if a chap had to emigrate."

"Would that be good citizenship?" Cyril demanded slyly.

"Why the hangment not?" replied Hothersall indignantly. "A felly can spend his income as he likes. . . . I'll own the Government'd be wise to stick to all the old furniture itself, like it does to paintings and valuable bric-à-brac. . . . Though maybe they'd have difficulty in finding the storage room."

"I see that they've not commandeered all the porcelain," said Cyril, pointing to a dark-blue Chelsea vase on the mantelpiece.

Hothersall winked significantly.

"There's nowt improper in collaring what other folks overlook," he answered, with a chuckle. . . . "See here," he continued, taking a shagreen case from one of the glass cupboards and revealing the miniature it contained. "That's a genuine Cooper. . . . It should be in South Kensington by rights," he added, with another wink, "but a Government official let me buy it. . . . Lord bless you, they don't know what to do with all the stuff."

A few minutes later the pair set off in Cyril's little de Dion towards Manchester. In addition to the excellent system of omnibuses and tram-cars there were swarms of motor-cycles and small run-abouts on the highway, for the workmen were importuning the Communes more persistently every day to provide them with private vehicles on favourable terms. Many of them, however, finding the traffic too congested for enjoyment, soon returned to the public conveyances, and some patronised

the new aeroplane services, but these latter, owing to the not infrequent crashes, were only popular with the more adventurous.

Most of the small villas were disappearing from the roadside, their places being taken by large communal sky-scrapers, and great Government stores had swept away the little shops. An unbroken façade of lofty red-brick edifices stretched almost all the way from Deansgate to Brooklands. In the city itself the same changes that had been at work in the metropolis had entirely transformed the appearance of the buildings. The little warehouses had vanished with the small capitalist, and the State, which had erected vast emporiums for the purpose, was the sole merchant and shipper.

The effect upon the trade of Lancashire had been as Hothersall had indicated on the previous evening. Government salesmen were more perfunctory in their methods of passing the goods that came from the manufacturer than the buyer of former days, whose livelihood had depended upon pleasing his customers. They were also more amenable to graft when the State official, who managed the weaving-shed or the dye-works, in order to escape the ignominy of having an order thrown upon his hands, was anxious, as he generally was, to settle the matter by a bribe. Naturally, foreign customers were beginning to patronise the manufactures of other countries, where a less ingenuous system of business prevailed, and the natives of India especially had transferred much of their trade to Japan and America.

Cyril drove through the town without stopping and made his way past Pendleton along the Bolton road. Beyond the suburbs the aspect of the country had not altered greatly. The barrack-like cotton-mills, the motley bleach-works, and the gaunt mine-shafts looked much the same as they had always done. Although the Government had displayed the most feverish energy in rebuilding its cities it had not been justified hitherto in spending a great amount of money upon the reconstruction of its industries. The thought of this

occurred to Hothersall as they were passing a large weaving-shed.

"That's gettin' a ramshackle sort of shop, I reckon," he observed, indicating the mill with a jerk of his thumb.

"They only work about three days a week," replied Cyril, who was an efficient person, for although his job was uncongenial it was his bread and butter.

"I know. They make nainsooks for the Straits Settlements," said Hothersall. "One half of their plant ought to be scrapped."

"That's a hard task nowadays," answered the ex-Guardsman. "Every manager is clamouring for fresh machinery, so the Commune committees regard it as a cry of 'Wolf,' and procrastinate. . . . Besides, it's difficult for them to decide if it's right to spend money on a concern that's not paying its way."

Cyril Thring, Inspector of Factories, acted for the group of industries which he represented, in its dealings with the local branch of the Treasury, exactly as a bank clerk used to do for his particular company in its transactions with the Clearing-house. He was the medium by which the sorting and distribution of the various accounts were conducted. With the advent of Socialism, when every means of production had become national property, it was no longer necessary or desirable to make every separate payment by cheque or in the form of cash. Since it was obviously more expedient to establish a comprehensive system for the settlement of exchanges a local Clearing-house had been set up in all the great manufacturing centres for the adjustment of balances between the individual firms. Each month the innumerable factory inspectors presented the profit and loss accounts of all the manufactories under their control and the Clearing-house audited the accounts on a national basis. It was a natural sequence of Anymoon's great system of decentralisation, making each locality responsible for its own particular budget. Everything passed into a general pool, a pool indeed wholly repre-

sented by paper, but it was all there such as it was, which had been the main object of its originators.

About ten o'clock the de Dion arrived at a large engineering works, and while Cyril went into the office to interview the manager, Hothersall, who never lost an opportunity of making himself popular with the workmen, took a stroll through the premises. An old engineer himself he was completely in his element, and he strode breezily into the moulding-shop with his hands in his pockets, whistling a popular air. As soon as his eyes had adjusted their focus to the gloomy light of the vast apartment he saw that it was almost deserted. The only occupants of the place were three men, who were sprawling on the dark sand, smoking and playing at cards. Two were reclining against the dingy wall, whilst the third had propped himself against a small pile of foundry flasks, reared up on the ground for the purpose.

"Hullo, is it t' dinner hour?" demanded Hothersall sarcastically.

"By th' hectum, it's Tom Hothersall," grunted the moulder who was leaning against the flasks. "When thou art tired o' thy job, Tom, you mun turn it over to me . . . Aw'm fond o' playing, mysen."

Hothersall's crisp brown beard bristled with indignation.

"My job 'd noan suit thee, Chris," he retorted. "A chap got to keep hissel clean."

"Clane!" replied the grimy Chris imperturbably. "It's my besetting sin. . . ."

"What are you chaps assing about at this hour o' t' day?" cried Hothersall wrathfully. "And where are all thy mates? . . . Are they scowbanking likewise?"

"Some on 'em are having a bitin-on, and some on 'em are doing a bit o' ratting beside the haystacks," replied another of the moulders, dealing round the cards. "We start wark at eight o'clock, Tom, bear i' mind."

"You're a set of lazy gobbins, Jesse," said Hothersall, with withering scorn, "and I'm fair ashamed of thee."

"It's not for thee to come the Kaiser over us, Tom,"

snarled the dirty Chris. "Thou hast got a cushy job, my lad. . . . I wish I could swop wi' thee."

"Aye, so let's ha' noan of thy slave-driving," added Jesse. "There's supposed to be equality nowadays, though it's a mucking sort of equality to my notion."

"There's no bloody equality onywhere," continued Chris resentfully. "I nobbut get a pun a day by the sweat of my brow and that there mucking manager of ours is paid ten pun welly for assing about in a clane collar."

Hothersall stood aghast, fuming with indignation.

"He's one of the finest engineers in the whole land, that there manager of yours," he exclaimed, "as you very well know. . . . That electric riveting machine of his revolutionised the whole of boiler-plating. . . . He'd be worth more to the nation at a hundred pun an hour than thee, Chris, at a tanner."

"Gammon," returned Jesse, declaring "nap" triumphantly. "I'd make him fend wi' a tenth of his screw. . . . They've taken all the capital and it's high time they made a move to confiscate some of them fat salaries. . . . Take thy own case, Tom. . . . You could gang along reet enough wi' five hundred a year i'stead of five thousand."

"You're a set o' muffin-yeds," cried Hothersall, his blood rising. "How d' you expect the State to prosper unless you encourage the men of exceptional ability? . . ."

"Th' honour and glory should be enough for 'em," said Jesse dogmatically, laying down an ace and a king. "But I'm no believer in these clever folk. . . . Brains is evened out pretty equally all round. . . . I've just as much gumption as thee, Tom, if it comes to that."

"And who's to decide who's got brains and who hannot?" demanded Chris. "Equalise pay and you'll go a long way to equalise ability. . . . Besides, what's the use of these geniuses when we've all agreed to put things on a level?"

"It should be share and share alike now," said Jesse, displaying three more trump cards, "and to hell with all profiteers, Tom, like thee."

"Me a profiteer!" thundered Hothersall, "and you tell me this to my face with all I've done for you. . . . You're a set of ungrateful ragamuffins."

"It's a question of progress," observed Chris doggedly. "Because a chap's had his breakfast you don't expect him to go without his dinner. . . . That's how it is, Tom. . . . We've had our breakfasts off the capitalist and chaps like thee'll come in for our supper. . . . And that felly Cohen'd agree with every word I say."

Hothersall did not wait to hear more, but turning on his heel abruptly, he stalked out of the moulding-shop, exceedingly dismayed at his sudden unpopularity.

"I cannot understand what's coming over some folks," he remarked querulously to Cyril when they drove away from the engineering works half an hour later. "It's envy, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness."

"The people have been out for loot for a long time," answered Cyril laconically.

"Have you heard any talk against managers and officials?" demanded Hothersall eagerly.

"Almost every day," replied Cyril. "It's the latest agitation."

"Well, I'm gloppened!" ejaculated Hothersall.

The next manufactory they visited was a large print-works in a lonely valley a couple of miles from Bolton. Here, the manager, delighted to receive a Member of Council, volunteered to conduct them through the place, and Hothersall, who was not at all anxious for another confabulation with the workmen, accepted the proposal with alacrity. The man soon betrayed his motive. The three were standing in the print-room before a long row of fine printing-machines, of four, six and eight colours, through which streams of bleached calico were flowing swiftly, receiving the impressions of the copper rollers that stamped the pigments from their colour-boxes upon the white cloth. Behind each stood a range of hot cylinders, filled with low-pressure steam, over which the printed fabric passed without stopping. The manager pointed to one of these.

"Those drying-tins should all be copper by rights, Mr. Hothersall," he remarked. "I wish you'd use your influence with the Commune Committee to get me a new lot. . . . One can't do good work without proper tools, you know."

"Are you busy?" inquired Hothersall abruptly.

"No, I'm sorry to say we're rather slack," answered the manager lugubriously.

"Then I'm afraid the Committee won't listen to you, my friend," said Cyril. "They like to see a quick return for their money."

The manager, a sharp-featured, earnest little man, shook his head.

"I don't see how we're to ever get back our trade," he grumbled. "We're plagued to death by overpaid, ca' canny workmen. . . . It's ruination."

"Why don't you sack some on 'em?" said Hothersall vindictively.

The manager chuckled derisively.

"'Cause they'd all go on strike. . . . They know they're boss of the show and they intend to remain boss of the show. . . . They look upon the State as a sort of milk-cow."

"We'll have to abolish wages altogether," muttered Hothersall savagely; "that's what it'll come to."

The manager's eyes grew round with astonishment.

"Abolish wages!"

"Aye, and have payment in kind. . . . Like they did in the old days."

The manager slapped his thigh joyously.

"That's the ticket. . . . No song, no supper. . . . The tenderest spot of every man's his bread-basket."

"It would have to be equal rations all round, Hothersall," observed Cyril sarcastically; "you and our friend here would fare no better than that colour-mixer's boy yonder."

"Aye, that 'd be the trouble," responded the Councillor, summing up the situation far more precisely than he imagined.

"Meanwhile our business is going to rack and ruin," said the manager. "By right half our plant should have been cleared out long ago. . . . There was no bother in keeping up to date under the old firm."

"There'll ha' to be some alteration," said Hothersall, gazing gloomily at the kaleidoscopic streams of printed calico. "We can't go on as we are doing."

VII

One morning Mrs. Anymoon had persuaded her husband to accompany her on her weekly visit of inspection to one of the great National Maternity Homes, which occupied the whole of the eastern side of Northumberland Avenue. In the entrance hall they encountered the inevitable Mrs. Rhyle, the lady Councillor of State, also one of the Directors of the Home, who immediately attached herself to them.

Under the guidance of the matron they were shown into a spacious apartment on the ground floor, furnished as sumptuously as the drawing-room of a royal palace, where the convalescent patients were interviewed by the resident physicians before their discharge from hospital. Near the door as they entered a nurse in State uniform was weighing a rosy six-weeks-old baby, whose mother, a bold-faced girl with large roving eyes, was regarding the operation superciliously.

"Oh, what a beautiful child!" cried Mrs. Rhyle effusively, beaming upon the little group.

"Nine pounds six, madam," said the nurse, moving aside solicitously to exhibit the infant, with her hand at arm's length behind its neck.

"And what is its father?" inquired Mrs. Anymoon, with a smile at the youthful mother.

The young woman looked round defiantly.

"I dunno," she retorted. "I only see'd him twice."

The baby thrust its fat legs towards its chin and made a vain endeavour to put its toes into its mouth.

"Poor girl!" murmured the infinitely charitable Mrs. Rhyle. "Are you going to take care of the child yourself or leave it to the State?"

"I'll tike it myself," said the mother sullenly. "Though it were an accident it'll be better company than a little dawg."

"She's vexed because she says the neighbours look down on natural children," interposed the matron apologetically; "which is quite true, I'm ashamed to say."

Mrs. Rhyle's benevolent eyes cast a reproachful glance at the President.

"You hear that!" she remarked, with a sigh.

"It's no fault of mine, my dear lady," replied Anymoon, fidgeting uneasily.

"We all share the responsibility," said Mrs. Rhyle, with a sad smile. "There can be no equal justice under such conditions."

"It would be difficult to enforce equality in making babies," said Mrs. Anymoon serenely.

"It is a monstrous iniquity that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children," answered Mrs. Rhyle, with almost a hostile glance at the wife of the President.

"You forget that the subsequent marriage of the parents legitimatises a natural child," expostulated Anymoon. "The reform was long overdue, but we have got it."

"That is not sufficient," persisted Mrs. Rhyle, smiling benignly; "unless you abolish marriage altogether there can never be any true communistic happiness. . . . Our foolish prejudice with regard to the mere detail of parentage is the great stumbling-block to progress."

"You have the endowment of motherhood," persisted Mrs. Anymoon. "That is going quite far enough."

"It is not," replied Mrs. Rhyle gently. "Here is an object lesson. . . . This poor little child is to suffer social stigma because its parents will never be married."

"'Ow do I know where to find the chap?" exclaimed the young mother, regarding the remark as a reflection upon herself.

"You would have universal licence?" said Mrs. Anymoon severely.

"State control," retorted Mrs. Rhyle. "We've no right to our organisms save as far as the State will allow. . . . Therefore marriage is an anachronism. . . . The State has a right to decide exactly as to the number of babies it requires."

The bold-faced girl brightened up.

"Now the State 'as to pay I shouldn't mind 'ow many kids I 'ad," she observed, with a petulant shrug, "but for the look of the thing."

Anymoon moved away hastily. In a capacious arm-chair a few paces distant a stout woman with a crimson face was gazing fondly at a fat baby, which sat crowing triumphantly on her lap. Laying her hand solicitously on the President's arm, Mrs. Rhyle drew him towards the happy couple, while Mrs. Anymoon, with a little gleam of resentment in her placid eyes, followed promptly.

"So you are taking your baby away to-day, my good woman?" said Mrs. Rhyle sweetly, addressing the corpulent mother.

"Aye, worse luck," answered the woman, with a deprecatory grin, raising her tranquil, ox-like eyes. "My six weeks is up."

"You wish you were staying longer?"

The expansive grin broadened still further.

"Not 'arf! . . . It's living like a queen, that's what it is—here. . . . Folks to wite on yer and lovely food and all these beautiful fine rooms. . . . It's a beano."

"I'm glad you are pleased," purred Mrs. Rhyle, with a significant smile at Anymoon. "But the State has decided that six weeks is sufficient for a mother's convalescence, providing all goes well. . . . Personally I should prefer to make it two months."

"My dear lady," said Anymoon, whose usual aplomb seemed to have deserted him, "even the national wealth

is not inexhaustible. . . . We must put a limit to extravagance."

There was an unaccustomed frown on Mrs. Anymoon's placid brow.

"I hate parsimony," sighed Mrs. Rhyle, gazing wistfully around the magnificent apartment.

"Lord bless yer," observed the stout lady, encouraged by the interest that was being taken in her, "I expect I'll be back here in nine months' time. . . . I've only been married three years, and this is my third . . ." and she placed her red hand behind her baby's head proudly. "It's in the family. My mother 'd fourteen and reared 'em all, and my sister's got eleven up to now."

The fat infant showed its gums and cooed appreciatively.

"Would your State control put an end to this sort of thing?" inquired Mrs. Anymoon, with a lazy shudder.

"Not necessarily," said Mrs. Rhyle tranquilly. "We should breed from the best stock."

"Yes, undoubtedly," agreed the matron, stealing a glance of inquiry at Mr. Anymoon, who avoided her eye and looked at his watch nervously.

"If I tike arter the rest of my family I'm sure to be a reg'lar customer," continued the corpulent mother, growing more voluble, "and I won't grumble neither. . . . In the old days having a biby weren't no joke when yer 'd to shift for yerself when yer was confined. . . . But it's child's pliy, I call it, now yer can come to a plice like this. . . . Mine's all 'ealthy ones, thank 'Evin, and I shall always look upon a visit here as tiking a holiday. . . . There's some pleasure in getting into the family wiy nowadays."

"You've just listened to some forcible arguments in favour of State regulation," said Mrs. Rhyle to the President's wife as they walked on.

"Certainly, they are very strong arguments against encouraging indiscriminate reproduction," replied the reactionary Mrs. Anymoon. "As Mr. Hothersall, I believe, once put it very forcibly, 'We shall be littered-up with children.'"

The next convalescent mother to be interviewed was a vitriolic little woman, who was trying ineffectually to shake a fretful infant into repose.

"My good girl," interposed Mrs. Rhyle, ever officious, although quite unlearned in baby-lore through lack of practical experience, "please don't shake it. . . . See if there's a pin sticking into it."

"It's not a pin," said the mother sullenly. "It's temper."

"I'm afraid it's rather an irritable child," explained the matron.

"There must be some reason why it cries," persisted Mrs. Rhyle in great distress. "All children are good naturally."

"Ger on," snapped the woman. "Mine is as vicious as young weasels. . . . Shur up, you little beast!"

And she proceeded to shake more vigorously.

"Poor little mite," said the kind-hearted Mrs. Rhyle. "Let me take it."

"Take it an' welcome," said the woman, handing over the vociferous bundle, "and you can stick to it for all I cares."

"Don't you love your child?" demanded Mrs. Rhyle, aghast, strivingly inefficiently to comfort the noisy infant.

"You'd better let me have it, madam," interposed the matron, taking the baby into her skilful arms.

"Love it!" cried the mother. "I hate the sight of 'em. . . . Little brats!"

"Ah, you don't mean what you say," observed the matron soothingly.

"I mean every word of it," persisted the woman irritably. "It's enough to bring the varmints into the world without having to sweat and toil for 'em afterwards. . . . The State 'll have to rear every one of mine, if I've a score, and so I give you fair warning. . . . You can only live your life once and I intend to get as much enjoyment as I can out of mine."

"Most women get the greatest pleasure out of their children," said Mrs. Anymoon reproachfully.

"Maybe, in the old days, mum," retorted the unnatural mother, "but times's changed. . . . The State asks for the babies, so it should look after them. . . . Breeding 'em's a business now, and there were never much fun about it neither. . . . It's we women's sad humiliation."

It was a very contemplative President that strolled along the Mall with his wife towards St. James's Palace half an hour later.

"The old working-class is more prolific than ever before," he remarked at length, "and the old bourgeoisie and the rest of them are even less productive. . . . It is not an encouraging prospect."

"But the Commonwealth should only recognise one class," said Mrs. Anymoon mischievously.

"Not altogether. . . . After all, there's something in heredity. . . . We want the men of exceptional ability to reproduce their kind."

"That should be unnecessary. . . . Don't you expect that equal opportunity will bring about a universal levelling-up of intellect?"

"Of course," said Anymoon impatiently, "in time."

"Meanwhile it's only natural that the more cultured should be deterred because they cannot provide an assured position for their children."

"That's an old story. . . . We abolished bequest long ago."

"On the theory that heredity counts for nothing," she retorted, striding along with difficulty to keep pace with him.

"The cultured people shouldn't shirk their responsibilities. . . . We want children from them."

"Isn't their sterility the result of feeling their responsibilities too acutely? . . . It looks as though you will have to put Mrs. Rhyle's theories into force if you want them to breed freely."

"God forbid! . . . Don't we agree that the bulk of the population doesn't require any incentive?" said Anymoon, halting beneath the shade of a tree and removing his tall grey hat to cool his over-heated pink brow.

"Because they are willing to hand over their responsibilities to the State. . . . It's a matter of tradition. . . . But you're in a dilemma, my dear. . . . Your pampering of motherhood is leading to over-production and a lessening of parental affection. . . . The logical conclusion is Mrs. Rhyle's farm-yard policy."

"Damn Mrs. Rhyle!" said the perplexed President.

"With all my heart," replied his wife. "Meanwhile you'll get an abundance of babies from the women who patronise the Maternity Homes, but girls like Grace Dalrymple will think twice before they oblige you."

"At all events, she's going to get married," said Anymoon irascibly, mopping his forehead; "and it's really too bad of you, my dear, to mix me up with these obstetric matters. . . . I am not a man-midwife."

And all unknown to Anymoon, as he sauntered down the Mall on this blazing July morning, a dirty little Austrian Jew in a dingy workshop far away in the depths of Whitechapel was busily engaged in the construction of an elaborate piece of clockwork.

VIII

A YOUNG and fragile girl was sitting in Betty's private room at one of the National stores in Manchester with her head upon the table, sobbing piteously. She had just received notice after a stormy interview with a termagant manageress. A compassionate fellow-worker stood beside her, endeavouring to console her. Betty, seated in front of her desk near the window, was looking on, sympathetic but judicial.

"It's really very naughty of you, Mabel," she observed, trying not to smile; "you oughtn't to have been rude to a customer."

The girl raised a pretty, tear-stained face, inflamed with weeping.

"She began it," she whimpered; "spiteful ole cat!"

"But shop-girls must be civil, you know," said Betty reproachfully, "whatever happens."

The delinquent Mabel screwed a crumpled handkerchief first into one eye and then into the other, her lips fluttering tremulously.

"I was civil—at first," she replied, her pretty features puckered with indignation, "until I got moidert with her. . . . She kep' me at it for a full half-hour dragging down boxes and rummaging in drawers. . . . I matched her rubbishy bit of ribbin for her a dozen times and she knew it, but she's one of that sort as are never happy unless they're giving trouble to other folks. . . . 'Why don't you show me a smoke-blue?' she says. 'I have,' I says, 'and you'll never get anything nearer, mum,' I says, quite polite; 'it's as near a shade to your ribbin as my right hand is to my left.' 'No one can see what shade they are, girl,' she says, just like that, 'for dirt.' 'Ho, indeed,' I says, getting my rag out, as was natural. 'If your face was washed as clean as my hands you wouldn't look such a painted old Jezebel.' . . . She ast for it and she got it."

"We all know her," said the other shop-girl, with a contemptuous toss. "Her 'usband's the manager of one of the big warehouses. . . . My hat, she's a tartar."

"The manageress is very cross with you, Mabel," said Betty. "I'll do my best to beg you off, but I'm afraid you'll have to go."

"No fear," replied the elder girl decisively. "If Mabel were to get the sack for saucing an old 'ag like that we'd all go on strike."

"I'm vexed too," said Betty diplomatically, disregarding the unanswerable threat. "Young girls shouldn't be impertinent to old ladies. . . . Besides, look at your hands, Mabel. . . . They are far too dirty to handle clean materials."

"I shouldn't like to hurt your feelings, missis," answered Mabel evasively, with a glance at her grimy paws. "We like you—don't we, Hilda?"

"All on us," said Hilda emphatically.

"Well, you'll have to apologise to Mrs. Rothwell," continued Betty firmly.

"What! go down on my knees to that ole geezer?" exclaimed Mabel, her mouth and nose twisted into a pout. "Not much."

"Saleswomen must be polite to their customers," said Betty severely.

"It makes no odds whether you soap 'em up or not," answered Hilda, a tall, hard-featured woman of twenty-six. "It's just the same if they goes away to another shop. . . . Shops all belongs to the State."

"Yus, it's the customers' turn now," added Mabel. "It's for them to do the bowing and scraping."

"Of course there should be politeness on both sides," said Betty sternly.

"It's up to yon old Mrs. Rothwell to be civil, at all events," continued Hilda. "She gets far more of the good things of life than me and Mabel. . . . Her 'usband has nearly twenty times the pay of us."

"If I could afford to put half as much on my back as her," said Mabel, wrinkling up her pretty nose, "I'd see as I didn't look sich an ole fright."

"It fairly gives one the sick," continued Hilda. "She's only got her 'ome to look after while we've to slave in a shop all day, and she's treble the spending money, and more, than we have. . . . There's very little equality about things still."

"My dear girls," said Betty sententiously, "how can there ever be equality? . . . We're not all born alike."

"I dersay you're right, missis," replied Mabel, with round, reflective blue eyes. "But then why do they make sich a fuss about it and pretend we are?"

"O' course Mrs. Thring is right," said Hilda. "Jest look at this blessed store. . . . Are the girls here equal? . . . Not much! . . . And I should be sorry for myself if they was."

"You get equal wages," interposed Betty slyly.

"Yes," answered Hilda, taking advantage of the

opportunity of haranguing a sympathetic listener, "and by the end of next Friday night—what then? Eight out of ten has spent it in cinemas and tea-shops, and one p'raps 'll get summat with it, like clothes or jew'lry, as 'll last. . . . It's only the odd girl as 'll lock it away in a drawer, like me. . . . I've a good lump sum put by again the time I want to get wed."

"I'm one of the saving sort too," said Mabel. "Almost every stitch I wear's the work of my own hands with the help of my mother."

"Aye, it's a help when you've got clever fingers and like using your needle," said Hilda, looking at Mabel's neat costume admiringly. "I see no reason why a girl as lives at home shouldn't save a hundred pound a year. . . . If she began at twenty there'd be a tidy sum for her childer by the time she were forty."

"But if she died she couldn't leave them more than a thousand pounds," observed Betty, eager to point a moral.

"If it were all in money, who'd be any the wiser?" exclaimed Mabel, who had the sound, practical mind of the Lancashire working-girl. "Not that I should ever save one half of it . . . and likewise, I don't mean to peg off as early as that."

"Why shouldn't you leave what you save to your own flesh and blood?" demanded Hilda impatiently.

"Because the State doesn't approve of what we used to call thrift," answered Betty. "It gives an adequate wage to every man and woman, with an old-age pension to follow, and so it regards saving as unnecessary, besides being anti-social as well."

"But if you can't spend the money you're like to put it by," retorted Hilda. "Cinemas hurt my eyes, and I have to be very careful what I eat. . . . I'm for home life myself and reading, and I can always get all the books I want from the library for nowt. . . . Why should I be compelled to fritter?"

"Besides, if one saves up when one's single one can go a splash, like that ole geezer, when one's wed," continued the practical Mabel.

"The fact is, missis, most of them officials get far too big a screw," said Hilda. "That's the long and short of it. Consequently, they're jealous lest folks should save and get equal a bit with them. . . . There's jest as much jealousy in this world as ever there were. . . . Look at this here store. . . . Half of the girls are wild with jealousy again me and Mabel 'cause we keep ourselves respectable and don't conflab with any sort of chap we meets in the street."

"We've got decent, respectable homes," said the pretty Mabel superciliously.

"There you have another instance of inequality," said Betty. "It makes you far better off than the poor girls who have to live in lodgings."

"That's a accident," retorted Mabel. "The State can't bring their fathers and mothers back to life like Lazarus."

"But some people say that it could give them equivalent compensation," said Betty.

"Yus, and make 'em more stuck-up than ever," said Hilda, only half comprehending.

"But you have confessed that you look down upon many of them yourself."

"Who could 'elp it? The pieces! . . . If they had their deserts half on 'em 'd get jolly well smacked."

"They think of nothing but dressing up and carrying on with knuts," added Mabel disdainfully; "and if they get into trouble they know that the State 'll help 'em out. . . . Girls don't seem to care about being properly wed nowadays. . . . I suppose they know that one chap 'd soon get sick of them."

"And now you know, mum, why me and Mabel has to keep ourselves select," observed Hilda. "We've got decent lads of our own and we mean to steer clear of the wrong side of the blanket."

"Yet you think that all these girls would stop work if Mabel is sent away?" inquired Betty, wondering.

"Aye, like birds," returned Hilda. "They'll want very likely to give an old geezer a slice of their tongues themselves one of these days."

"Still, Mabel, to oblige me, you'll apologise?" said Betty coaxingly.

For a moment the girl gazed defiantly into the radiant face of the young matron, and then, abashed by the friendly glance of the kind, merry brown eyes, her own saucy blue ones were hidden by their long lashes.

"Well, to please you, mum, I'll say I'm sorry," she murmured, hanging down her head. "It isn't often I forget to wash my 'ands."

IX

THE same evening Cyril and Betty went to a Cinema Theatre in the neighbourhood of their home, a new and spacious place of entertainment like most of its kind under the new régime. A series of pictures was being displayed, showing panoramic views of the principal countries of the world, which had been taken by order of the State with an educational object in view.

The first scenes had been photographed in Norway, a country with which Cyril Thring was familiar, having visited it frequently on fishing expeditions in former days. The itinerary started from Bergen, and as the pictures flashed across the screen he soon recognised one of the most famous valleys of the world, in whose waters he had caught many a splendid salmon. The valley was twenty miles long, a mighty river brawling along from end to end of it, fed by hundreds of falls and torrents and cataracts that poured from the lofty mountains which environed it on every side.

It had altered most amazingly. Æsthetic considerations had not been allowed to bar the path of progress, and magnificent factories were now dotted about everywhere. The whole of the great watershed had been harnessed in the service of commerce, each mountain stream driving a succession of great turbines or con-

centrating its entire force upon one single power-station. The vast valley was a thriving hive of industry. It was easy for Cyril to identify many of the manufactories. There were cotton-mills and weaving-sheds and bleach-works and dye-works—each obvious and unmistakable—just the same as they had in Lancashire, but up-to-date and brand-new, formidable competitors sprung up within recent years.

"I was always convinced that Norway and Sweden would become two of the greatest manufacturing countries in the world," he muttered. "With their immense water-power they should be irresistible."

"And they will compete with us?" said Betty.

"Most effectively. . . . They have not the expense of providing coal. . . . Their falls and rivers do it all for them."

"But what a pity it is to spoil their beautiful country!" sighed Betty.

The pictures changed to scenes in industrial India, passing on to Japan, and even giving views of commercial life in newly-awakened China. And always they had the same story to tell. Mills and workshops were everywhere, recent and vast erections, the interiors as well as the exteriors being revealed by the films—one and all seeming costly and thriving and efficient. And among them were innumerable cotton-mills and weaving-sheds, new competitors of Lancashire. Nor was there any appearance of idleness or discontent amongst the workmen. There was no suggestion of ca' canny. The docile and easy-going Oriental did the work that he was called upon to do mechanically and without resentment.

"Poor old England!" said Betty. "Every country seems to be setting up shop against us. . . . We shall have to wake up."

"So we were told long years ago," replied Cyril. "Scandinavia has cheap driving-power, and the Oriental countries have an unlimited supply of cheap labour. . . . It must always be cheaper than British labour, for its wants are fewer. It's a matter of climate. . . . We can't

afford to give them long handicaps unless we make a spurt."

"I don't see how anyone could get any spurt out of a Socialistic country," she answered scornfully.

"Yes, it's a crime now to expect a man to stir his stumps. . . . They call it slave-driving."

Betty pointed to the film.

"Those Chinese workmen look happy enough. . . . But aren't they ugly?"

"Of course they're happy. . . . They're not always thinking they're miserable."

The great industries of the United States and of Canada, many pictures of which were shown, appeared inordinately prosperous. It seemed as though these vast steel and iron works must be sufficient to meet the requirements of the whole world. They saw the welding together of huge high-pressure boilers, the construction of triple-expansion engines for steamship and for factory, the contriving of all kinds of artful machinery for the textile industries.

"It's strange to think now that England was the cradle of invention," said Cyril sadly. "We showed the world how to make steam-engines and locomotives and power-looms and spinning-machines. . . . The development of electric science is due to an Englishman. . . . We've taught them everything they know."

"And now we're going to be left behind," said Betty.

Not one of the countries depicted on the film was a Socialist country. Norway and Sweden, India, China and Japan, Canada and the United States of America were still organised on the same economic basis that they had always been. Every one of them continued to put its trust in the competitive system, and regarded individual effort as a priceless national asset. And they were all prosperous.

Of all the countries in the world, in France alone was there any continuous unrest. Although still wealthy by reason of her natural resources and the industry of her inhabitants, France had not made as great progress as was

expected of her since the war. She did not adopt Communism like England, and she had succeeded in reducing her bureaucracy to within reasonable limits; but unfortunately every Frenchman is a born politician, always ready to forsake business for politics on the least provocation, and the bad habit had not yet been eradicated. Yet, many views of agricultural France were thrown upon the screen, and it was manifest to Cyril and Betty that the French peasant, both in the wine districts and the arable, had lost nothing of his old thrift and diligence.

The last pictures to be shown had been taken in Germany. After the final victories of the Allies it had seemed inevitable that the Central Powers would have to submit to drastic terms of peace. The great war machine of Prussia was smashed beyond repair. Everyone hoped and expected that the whole nation would receive a just punishment for its crimes. But with one accord the entire German Empire threw up its hands and shouted "Kamerad!" They promised "restitution and reparation" spontaneously. With streaming eyes they declared that they had been betrayed by their wicked rulers, but that, realising now the error of their ways, their "hearts were completely changed."

In response a resounding echo had reverberated through Great Britain and America:

"Kiss and be friends and don't humiliate Germany."

One stipulation only was made by these tender-hearted condoners of "frightfulness." In deference to democracy they insisted that Germany should depose the Hohenzollerns and transform itself in a republic; and every German from eastern Prussia to the borders of the Rhine, with an ecstatic grin, overjoyed to escape so easily, bellowed a delighted chorus of "Yah!" So they got rid of their Kaiser and drew long, exultant breaths of relief.

They had every reason to congratulate themselves. Although almost bankrupt they saw that Great Britain, France, Belgium and Italy were almost bankrupt too, while the United States was eager to welcome them into a League of Nations. They knew that the mineral

wealth of their country being greater by far than that of England they could make up leeway much more rapidly, and, to escape further punishment, they promised cheerfully to pay adequate compensation to Belgium and to northern France in an annual tribute when they were able to afford. Then they set about putting their house in order, and began to work and to organise so as to be able to compete with their commercial rivals and get rich once more.

It was obvious, although only a few years had passed away, that the terms of a generous peace would enable them to succeed far more quickly than their fondest hopes had anticipated. Their mills and workshops were soon busy, since, from all over the world, there was an immense demand for every kind of manufactured commodity, which millions had been unable to obtain during the long war. Their coal and iron brought them a wealth of gold. Yet, although they were growing so rich again their annual tributes to Belgium and to France were far in arrears, and there was much friction, but nothing more, between the three countries in consequence.

And as the German people took stock of their position it began to dawn upon them that perhaps the war had not been such a bad thing after all, and their loyal hearts warmed towards their royal family. For some time there had been a growing party which insisted that a monarchy was the natural constitution of the Teutonic race, to whom discipline and obedience were essential, surrounded as they were by alien races which must always be hostile to them. When the League of Nations, alarmed by these manifestations, hinted to the President of the German Republic that any such change would be contrary to the Peace of Versailles, several members of the Reichstag answered boldly that every nation had an inalienable right to decide what form of government it should possess, and that the League of Nations had no power to interfere in the internal affairs of Germany. Likewise when the League of Nations suggested that the Germans should continue to pay their annual tributes to Belgium and France, the

Germans replied that they were not able to afford. And, having been established to preserve peace, the League of Nations could not use force of arms. Besides, it was unthinkable to jeopardise human life for the sake of filthy lucre.

As Cyril gazed upon the pictures showing the great shipbuilding yards of Hamburg and the stupendous aniline dye-works of Bremen, and observed the evident prosperity of the cities of Frankfort, Cologne and Berlin, he realised that Germany was recovering from her world-wide struggle relatively as swiftly as France had recovered after the Franco-Prussian War.

"When we had them on their backs we ought to have kept them there," he muttered. "What security have we that they won't begin again as soon as they are ready?"

"It would have served them right to have made them pay for the war, as they could have done," said Betty, "then no one in England would have wanted Socialism. . . . We could have let the Germans experiment with it first."

"Well, the lesson of what we've seen this evening is this," said Cyril, when the performance came to an end a few minutes later. . . . "International Socialism was counted out when they built the Tower of Babel."

X

Thring and Parker stood together on the pierhead at one of the southern ports, watching a picket-boat that was churning its way towards them through the gleaming waters. It was a bright morning in early August, with a brisk, south-easterly breeze, and the blue surface of the harbour was flecked with tumbling wave-crests. The midshipman in charge swung his little launch daintily alongside the landing-stage and saluted, and the two

landsmen, aided by the steadying hand of the coxswain, stumbled down into the stern sheets.

"Cast off forward!"

The bell tinkled, and the picket-boat was gliding swiftly on its return journey.

Thring's keen eyes wandered appreciatively over the spick-and-span little craft, observing the spotless paintwork and the shining brass and the spruce garb of the alert sailors.

"There's nothing sloppy here, sir," murmured Parker, voicing his master's thoughts.

"It's like old times," answered Thring, wondering.

They were visiting part of what remained of the old battle-fleet, to supervise the half-yearly stocktaking of stores and equipment for the information of the National Council.

A quarter of an hour later, while Thring was gazing with lack-lustre eye across the dancing waves, a huge grey mass appeared suddenly to tower above him, and he became conscious that the boat was gliding alongside a battleship. It stopped at the foot of a railed ladder that reached to the water's edge, and a moment later he found himself climbing the snowy steps. A little group of officers was standing on the deck to greet him, and the first lieutenant, a stalwart figure with a face as rosy as a milkmaid's and eyes that shone like stars, came forward and grasped him warmly by the hand.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," he cried warmly. "Come to the wardroom and have a cocktail."

"Not a bad scheme," said the paymaster, with a welcoming smile. "You and I are in for a dry job, Mr. Thring."

They walked along dazzling decks, past saluting sailors and attentive marine-sentries and down lighted passages, the visitors perceiving more completely each moment that they had entered into a new world, where discipline and efficiency were the presiding deities. Pausing for a moment at a scupper, Thring looked back across the dancing waters of the harbour to the distant town, whose

straggling roofs and spires, seen through a forest of masts, stretched far along the borders of the broad estuary, and his eyes wandered beyond the rising uplands, with their woods and meadows, to the high bare downs, silhouetted far away against the fleecy clouds. And, although it was scarcely a mile from where he stood, this socialist England, it seemed already as far removed as the mountains of the moon. He realised that life on this great cruiser, alone of all the institutions of Great Britain, was just the same as it always had been. A few moments later, he and Parker were seated in the wardroom amidst a small crowd of laughing lieutenants, while the steward was handing round a tray of tawny wine-glasses.

"Do any of the Members of Council ever visit you?" inquired Thring, as he sipped his cocktail.

"Nary a soul of them," said the doctor. "The Navy's more forgotten than it was before the Boer War."

"I'll try to bring the President to see you," said Thring reflectively. "It would do him a lot of good."

"It 'd show him where his power lay," blurted out an engineer lieutenant. "They haven't left us many ships, but those we've got are just the finest fighting force in the whole world still."

"If there's ever trouble on shore, gentlemen," broke in Parker, with a suspicion of menace in his voice, "I'd back the Navy to put an end to it within a month."

The first lieutenant grinned appreciatively.

"The National Service people ought to be able to keep their own house in order," he remarked.

"I think the officers would throw in their lot with you, sir," retorted Parker ominously.

"That 'd be the Army versus the People again—what?" laughed the paymaster. "It's out of place in these Brotherhood of Man days."

"He means that the Services will always be on the side of law and order," said Thring hastily.

The same evening, after his laborious duties in the paymaster's office were finished, Thring dined *tête-à-tête* with the captain in his cabin. He had inspected the

great cruiser from end to end and was greatly impressed by the smartness and efficiency of the crew. When the servant had withdrawn, the talk soon drifted into politics.

"I suppose you heard we'd orders to steam for the mouth of the Thames when that Trafalgar Square mob seemed dangerous three months ago?" said the captain.

Thring nodded.

"Anymoon leaves nothing to chance, Rouse," he answered. "What was the idea?"

The captain filled his pipe.

"Well, you know the only munition works left are Armstrong's and Woolwich Arsenal. . . . They might have wanted protecting."

"But the National Service could have done that."

Captain Rouse smiled.

"Yes, up to a point. . . . They're fine lads, the whole million of them, and their training is splendid. . . . But when all's said and done, they're just policemen, not soldiers. . . . They haven't half a dozen batteries of artillery. . . . The only guns we have now are our guns."

Thring smiled grimly.

"You see, my friend, the National Service is merely for the sake of discipline. . . . It is not intended to make war. . . . The League of Nations has made war impossible."

The sailor stroked his pointed red beard.

"I wonder what the Germans really think about that," he muttered.

"They've got enough to do in working themselves out of the bankruptcy court," said Thring carelessly.

"I see you have the same opinion of them as you had in 1914," answered Captain Rouse dryly. "The German Navy, like ours, is supposed to be under the control of the League of Nations. But what's to prevent either of us from acting on our own?"

"Well, to come back to the question of the National Service," returned Thring, who had been one of the multitude that had thought war impossible until it occurred—"so you think they're no good?"

"I don't say that. . . . I only say they've not an army . . . and I'm sure their officers would agree with me. . . . I doubt whether there are enough rifles for them to go round, and I'm sure there's very little ammunition."

"Quite sufficient to maintain law and order."

"It may be so. . . . All I know is that last May, Anymoon asked for cruisers and destroyers to be sent both to the Thames and the Tyne."

Thring sat and pondered.

"There's a great deal of unrest," he remarked thoughtfully. "Still, I don't believe the Cohen party would resort to force. . . . We use votes instead of bullets nowadays."

"A little force pushes on a revolution far quicker than votes. . . . Some of the National Service might go over to them. . . . I don't mean the officers, of course."

"Anymoon has a safeguard against that, remember. . . . Only the regiments told off for shooting-drill carry rifles."

"I've not forgotten that. . . . There's hundreds of thousands of them stored in the Armoury opposite the old Houses of Parliament. . . . Perhaps that's why the President wanted a destroyer or two down the river."

"By Jove," cried Thring, "I never thought of that. . . . I wonder whether he believed there was a danger of the place being looted."

"If we'd landed a party it would have been impossible," said Captain Rouse, with a quiet smile.

Thring poured out a glass of port-wine.

"Would your men obey you, whatever happened?" he inquired diffidently.

"They'd always be loyal to the Government in power. . . . That's to say if it were really a government—not an anarchy."

Thring smiled grimly.

"You mean that they'd do as their officers told them without question? . . . The spirit of the Service is still in their bones."

"Yes, just as it always was."

"There's never any trouble about discipline?"

"Without it a ship couldn't keep afloat."

Thring chuckled.

"Yes, there doesn't seem room for much equality here."

"No, we're too busy to think of it."

Parker dined with the senior officers in the wardroom, a privilege to which his position as Thring's assistant naturally entitled him. Nor did his hosts detect any idiosyncrasy in his behaviour, save a disposition to indulge in political discussions unfavourable to the Government of the day. It was his first visit to a battleship, and he lost no opportunity of increasing his knowledge of the Service.

"We've still a dozen cruisers, sir," he informed Thring, with satisfaction, as he bade him good-night in his cabin after folding up his suit as usual.

"But not all like this one."

"We've three others like her . . . with sixteen-inch guns, all of them . . . and two dozen first-class destroyers . . . and if the President chooses to put his foot down, I'll warrant the sailor-men will back him up."

"What an autocrat you are, Parker," said Thring, with a yawn, getting into his bunk.

But all the same he, too, had been much exhilarated by all that he had seen on the warship.

XI

Grace Dalrymple was seated at the writing-table in her office at Burlington House, where, as one of the members of the National Committee of Art, she watched over the interests of women writers and women artists. An attendant, who had just entered the room, was handing her a couple of visiting-cards.

"Will you show the lady and gentleman in," she said at once, recognising the names of two celebrated acquaintances.

A moment later the pair made their appearance—a world-renowned lady novelist and a famous playwright. They were not related to each other, and they had often had bitter altercations in the public press, so Grace was somewhat surprised that they should call upon her together. The woman, a person with peroxide hair and sharp, alert features, was the first to speak.

"We have come to you, Mr. Gossamer and I, because we know, Miss Dalrymple, that we shall find you sympathetic," she observed, with a smile of patronage, sinking into a chair.

"We intend to take you fully into our confidence, madam," added Mr. Gossamer in a deep bass voice.

He was a stout, bald-headed man with a trim, black beard and a projecting tooth, which he had a habit of sucking.

"To come to business at once," continued Mrs. Stillingham, the lady novelist, with the air of a queen, "most imaginative writers are agreed that Socialism, from their point of view, is the end of all things."

"This is in strict confidence, madam," said Mr. Gossamer nervously, with his tongue upon his tooth.

"I don't care a rap who knows my opinions," continued Mrs. Stillingham, with a deprecatory frown at her companion. "I intend to place them before the President himself. . . . Socialism, I repeat, has ruined my career absolutely."

"Many unhappy people can say the same," replied Grace, with a sad gleam in her hazel eyes.

"They are able to do other things," retorted Mrs. Stillingham; "I cannot. . . . I am a writer of fiction, and Socialism, I repeat, has killed fiction."

"And the drama as well," said Mr. Gossamer.

"How are we to find a plot?" demanded Mrs. Stillingham; "or a *motif* for a story? . . . To put the case baldly, the rich uncle no longer exists. The heiress

does not marry the industrious apprentice. There is no King Cophetua and no beggar maid. A mortgage cannot be foreclosed, and they won't hang Tess of the D'Urbervilles, however many lovers she sticks a knife into. There is no variety in life at all."

"It is still more difficult to write for the stage," said Mr. Gossamer sepulchrally. "It is almost impossible to invent incident. . . . Such plays as *Quinney's* or *The Great Adventure* are entirely obsolete. . . All our stock-in-trade has gone."

"Supposing *The Little Minister* or *The Dop Doctor* or *Robert Elsmere* had never been published," continued Mrs. Stillingham, "they could not be written now. . . . Whenever I conceive a great idea I find myself held up by the existing order of things. . . . What room is there for fancy when everything is on a dead level?"

"Not quite, surely," answered Grace; "there is some diversity still."

"It all radiates round the parish pump," said Mrs. Stillingham scornfully, "and one can't construct stories for ever round the parish pump. . . . Mankind, and womenkind also, is divided broadly into three classes —officials, managers and workers. . . . One cannot ring the changes for ever on these."

"Human beings are getting so infernally uninteresting," lamented Mr. Gossamer. "Their motives are absolutely stereotyped, if I may use the phrase. . . . There is no tragic mischief now except disease. . . . And Ibsen has said the last word there."

"Besides, the public is sick of people with sluggish livers and high blood-pressure," snapped Mrs. Stillingham. "Mr. Gossamer has used the right word, though perhaps not grammatically. . . . Everything in life is stereotyped, and consequently we have rung the death-knell of art."

"But surely there are some interesting people still to write about," said Grace, not a little amused. "You'll have to be content with less elaborate plots and devote yourselves to the analysis of human nature. . . . The proper study of——"

"The tale's the thing," interrupted Mr. Gossamer.

"Human nature!" cried Mrs. Stillingham, with a toss of her peroxide coiffure; "it's all the same now . . . flat, stale and unprofitable. . . . John Halifax is no longer a gentleman, and Adam Bede is not a carpenter. . . . They're both merely salaried servants of the State. . . . Their careers are absolutely unedifying."

"Don't they fall in love any more?" inquired Grace slyly.

Mrs. Stillingham turned upon her indignantly.

"Love!" she cried scornfully. "Its literary value has been destroyed utterly by eugenics and the puritan. . . . One is not allowed to publish a tale of real passion as one could a few years ago, and now, forsooth, there's a talk of putting the women into stud farms and serving out the men like stallions. . . . How can one write as if love existed in the face of such pernicious propaganda? . . . Love! Bah, they'll ration it, and everything else."

"There's one thing——" began the playwright.

"Gossamer!" snapped Mrs. Stillingham, "don't be indecent."

"Why can't you lay the scenes of your stories in foreign countries," suggested Grace, "since you find no scope in Great Britain?"

"I am no linguist, and travel is expensive," growled Mr. Gossamer.

"And a foreigner will beat one in nine cases out of ten when it comes to depicting his own people," snapped Mrs. Stillingham derisively. "That is what is happening. . . . We have put a premium upon the works of foreign writers. . . . I see nothing for it but to emigrate."

"Moreover, if you write of places where a different industrial system is in vogue you are regarded as reactionary," said Mr. Gossamer. "An author like Merriman or Crawford would be very unpopular with our Government now."

"It's the same with historical novels," continued Mrs. Stillingham. "If you describe a king or a statesman of

the past you are expected to point a moral in favour of present times. . . . My last story dealt with the age of Lord North, a most lovable personage, but none of our prejudiced critics approved of my portrait of him."

"I hate historical work," said Mr. Gossamer. "Any form of research is distasteful to me."

"It's laborious and it takes a very long time," added Mrs. Stillingham.

"Besides," said Mr. Gossamer, "one can't live wholly on the past. . . . It would be absolute stagnation."

"We shall have to!" cried Mrs. Stillingham. "They've dried us all up. . . . They've put an end to modern creative work. . . . We shall have to depend entirely upon the classics."

"To think of it," groaned Mr. Gossamer, who had always been a modern of the moderns. "Barrie and Pinero and Galsworthy, night after night! . . . There'll be an enormous increase in suicides."

"But both you and Mrs. Stillingham used to be the most eloquent pioneers of progress," observed Grace, with a mischievous smile. "Before the Revolution I remember that you were hailed as great iconoclasts by all the leading Socialists."

"I advocated intellectual Socialism," retorted Mr. Gossamer; "the Socialism that we have got is not intellectual."

"No," said Mrs. Stillingham, with withering scorn, "it is certainly not that."

"Well, you can't have it both ways," said Grace. "A State is either communistic or it's not. . . . Except for trifling modifications the change which you both deplore could not have been otherwise than it is."

"We've explained our views and it only remains to tell you of the object of our visit," replied Mrs. Stillingham haughtily, with a deprecatory cough. "A General Election has been announced, and since we are aware that you are a *persona grata* with the President we wish you to inform him that he will have the whole-hearted support of the Society of Authors in any drastic measure

that he chooses to take when he has obtained his majority, as he is certain to do. . . . Of course, it is no secret that he too is dissatisfied with the present state of affairs."

"But you must tell him this in strict confidence, Miss Dalrymple," added the cautious Mr. Gossamer, taking another pull at his tooth. "We wish to be quite sure of our ground."

"Fiddlesticks, Gossamer!" exclaimed the lady novelist. "I don't care a rap who knows what I think."

"Then you are hopeful as to the results of the General Election?" said Grace.

"Undoubtedly," replied Mrs. Stillingham; "the women are with Anymoon. . . . I have every confidence in their common sense."

"And you are not afraid that the extremists among them will prevail, as extremists generally do? . . . You have to reckon with Mrs. Rhyle."

"What do I care for Mrs. Rhyle! . . . Pooh! . . . Only let the President get his majority and I will back my influence against Mrs. Rhyle."

"I too am not wholly without disciples," said Mr. Gossamer, expanding his chest.

"Do you hope to put back the clock again?" inquired Grace wistfully.

"We hope to introduce that infinite variety which the old Socialists always promised us," said Mrs. Stillingham.

Grace glanced at her watch.

"I have an appointment," she said, glad of an excuse to terminate the interview. "Mrs. Anymoon's nephew comes from school to-day, and I have promised to go with him to a cinema."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Stillingham, looking very disappointed, "and I wanted to have a long talk with you about that wedding of yours."

XII

MUCH to the satisfaction of Crannock and Hothersall and other loyal colleagues, Anymoon made up his mind early in August to appeal to the country, and a General Election was announced forthwith. Since the last crisis three months previously things had been going from bad to worse in all departments of the State, and there was deeply-rooted discontent everywhere. A persistent cry arose for a stronger Government.

Anymoon's failure was not due, as the old-fashioned "Parliamentarians" alleged, to his methods of administration. The mere details of government, as long as the particular form of government is not foreign to the people, is a matter of small importance, and after all is said and done, "whate'er is best administered is best." Since Great Britain had been accustomed to local government for many generations there was nothing incongruous in the Anymoon system of Local Communes, which was merely the carrying-out of accepted propositions to their logical conclusion. Nor was the absence of a Parliament a defect of any moment. Although a national "talking-shop" of this description had been invaluable in former days, before the essential principles of freedom had been established, it had grown obsolete now that liberty was inviolable, and was a hindrance rather than a help to business. Moreover, the tendency of modern times was for the Parliament to become more and more subservient to the existing Government, owing to the omnipotence of the party machine, and thus it merely reflected the opinions of the administration of the day. It was simpler and infinitely more democratic to place the legislature and the sovereign power of the people on more intimate terms by a federation of Communes, with a benevolent National Council to preside over them. All were agreed that a Council was preferable to another

"talking-shop," but there was much diversity of opinion as to how far the Council should remain doge-like, and to what extent autocratic control should be delegated to it. However, everybody was dissatisfied and convinced that "something ought to be done."

The chief problem, of course, was an industrial one. The nation had abolished competition within its own borders, but it was still a competitor itself in the markets of the world. Its prosperity was dependent upon its commercial efficiency. Other countries, naturally, would only purchase its goods as long as they could not suit themselves better elsewhere, and if its goods did not find customers, there would be no money to buy the produce of other lands. Imports had to be paid for by exports, or, if the balance was against the exporter, the difference had to be made up in hard cash.

The Inland Revenue reports showed that for the past twelve months the balance of trade with foreign nations had been decidedly against Great Britain, and gold had been exported in large quantities to meet the deficit. It was obvious that this state of things could not continue indefinitely. Gold had to be paid for like any other commodity by the purchaser, and England could not obtain unlimited credit for bullion from the gold-producing countries without security. For some time the security would be forthcoming by pledging foreign investments, but when these were exhausted it was evident that, unless the nation mortgaged its shipping trade, it would have to depend solely upon its own commerce. It was plain that the people would be able to obtain less provisions from abroad unless that commerce increased, for the simple reason that they could not pay for the goods. And most of the provisions, as always, came from other lands. It appeared within the bounds of probability that Great Britain would soon be blockaded by poverty far more effectually than she ever had been by the U-boats of the Huns.

Many people believed that the chief cause of Anymoon's failure was the precipitancy with which he had established

a socialistic State. This objection, nevertheless, was a mere begging of the question, for whether the change came sooner or later, it could only have been successful if it was relevant to the community. A reform is good or bad only as far as it affects the immediate present, and if its result is bad it is futile to urge that it would have been beneficent had it been postponed for fifty years. No change is worth consideration that is inexpedient, however sublime are the moral principles on which it is based. The man who puts the clock forward is just as great a nuisance as he who puts it back, for both fail equally to observe the exact time. Anymoon's political sagacity was at fault, and, as mischief had been done, it was a poor excuse to declare that the mistake was only a chronological one. The art of doing the right thing at the right moment is the chief business of the statesman.

Nor was it altogether true that the fault lay in the organisation. A new job and a tough one had to be tackled, and the nation was obliged to cut its coat according to its cloth. Lawyers and stockbrokers and shopkeepers had to be converted into bricklayers because the country needed one class and not the other. A vast reconstruction had taken place because such reconstruction was the necessary and inevitable result of the Great Upheaval. It had been impossible to adjust things more gradually or more humanely since the nature of the circumstances called for swift decisions. Had there been time, the new bricklayers might have been reconciled to their new tasks by a system of benevolent apprenticeship, but there was no time. It was the thing itself and not the methods of doing it that were to blame.

The truth was, that the Great Change, altogether apart from the question of whether it had been too precipitative or whether it had been ill-organised, was inappropriate. It was utterly unsuited to the people whom it was supposed to benefit. However they might strive to adapt themselves to the altered circumstances their mentality remained the same as it always had been.

The man in the street, who sang aloud the praises of Communism and acclaimed the Brotherhood of Man, remained a selfish individualist at heart, and would be ready, in nine cases out of ten, to pocket something which he ought to have shared with the community, if no one was looking. For the Commonwealth to have prospered, universal altruism should have prevailed, but, hitherto, there had been no signs of "the change in human nature." Indeed, nothing could have brought about such a change except the process of evolution, or, if an immediate reformation was required, the most drastic compulsion.

In the old days a small leisured class had been no burden upon the community. On the contrary, it was a national asset, since its wealth represented so much productive industry in the past, and the spirit of emulation spurred others to make exertions to reach the same envied position. Just as a profession in which there are most plums will always attract the brightest intellects, so the fact that it was possible for ability to reap its reward by gaining riches was the greatest incentive for men to labour. But now this incentive had been almost extinguished. Leisure, as the reformers had intended, had been apportioned as equally as it could be. The whole nation was spoon-fed, taught to look to the State for support and not to depend upon individual exertion. The result was just the same as when the proprietors of a private firm in the past had exchanged their business for the certificates of a great syndicate. There was a universal resting upon oars.

Formerly, the members of the leisured classes had been able to perform many useful services for the State. They had set a high standard of culture, a matter of the highest national importance, which the more democratic communities of the world have been wholly unable to achieve. They had been pre-eminent in art and in literature and in scholarship, and nearly all the enterprise and invention, from which the country had benefited, emanated from them. They had erected a splendid

ladder, leading to "the golden mountain-tops," up which all men who were worthy had the chance to climb.

Of course, there was some emulation still amongst the managers and officials. Naturally, these men had to show to some extent that they were worth their salt. But this was neutralised by the fact that Jack in office is the most difficult person in the world to shift even when his inefficiency is manifest, and that there is the most loyal spirit of Trade Unionism in the world amongst members of a bureaucracy. Moreover, these men were greatly impeded by the knowledge of their unpopularity. In many cases they were inclined to truckle to the proletariat through fear that otherwise they might lose their places, and some of them, believing that their positions were secure, took their full share in the game of ca' canny. The managers were handicapped almost always by the lack of business capacity of the Local Communes to whom they were subservient, the members of which were for the most part professional politicians. A prolonged wrangle with an unintelligent committee was necessary in order to construct a new building or to erect a new plant. Or else, machinery in superabundance was forced upon them unsolicited, if its construction happened to suit the interests of the persons in power. All the old evils of municipal trading were multiplied a thousandfold.

There were innumerable disputes also between the various Communes with regard to the apportionment of the profits and losses of the industries under their control. Sometimes these bickerings were as absurd as the fable of the quarrel between the belly and the members. Yorkshire and Lancashire would complain that they clothed the whole of the agricultural counties and had to accept corn and vegetables in exchange, which they might have procured from abroad on more favourable terms. Newcastle would want to know what it got from the Metropolitan Commune in return for its coal and iron. Workmen in one part of the country would declare

that they were being robbed of the fruits of their labours in order to bolster up the wages of workmen in other localities. Someone was always imagining that he was being exploited for the benefit of someone else.

The chief cause of Anymoon's failure was the attitude of labour. In the days of competition a workman knew that he had to earn his wages. If he would not make some attempt to do so no Trade Union could prevent him, sooner or later, from losing his job. Now, however, he knew that he would get them whether he really tried to earn them or not. The principle of the standard wage was the bed-rock upon which the State existed, and nothing obliged a man to work any harder than he desired. Amongst the vast majority there was even less ambition to rise than there had been formerly, as everyone was more than satisfied with the money he was drawing. They regarded the State as if it were a bank, established by a company of mad philanthropists, into whose coffers all men could dip their hands. There was intense jealousy, of course, against the managers and officials, who drew a salary in excess of the standard wage, but this did not help to stimulate production.

Thus, trade had diminished and the value of money was falling, and, as its purchasing power declined, naturally the workman wanted more of it. The increase in the birth-rate — mostly illegitimate children — in consequence of "the endowment of motherhood," was a further tax upon the resources of the Commonwealth. The herd of officials, which grew larger every month, was an even greater burden still. The whole of the accumulations of the past were being used up for the benefit of the present generation, or, in other words, the nation was living on its capital. Even the abolition of the *rentier*, as his income was absorbed immediately in making up the national deficit, did not help to allay the general discontent. Since Cohen's meeting in Trafalgar Square, a very ugly temper indeed had been manifest throughout the whole country.

"The one great need is a strong central government,"

was the obvious comment that Mrs. Rhyle was never tired of reiterating in her numerous *tête-à-tête* discussions with the President.

Anymoon's alert blue eyes always beamed upon her sympathetically.

"That is what we are going to have, my dear lady," he would reply, caressing the wart upon his cheek.

"We have been in too great a hurry," she confessed sorrowfully, on one occasion. "The Great Change should have taken place gradually. . . . It was hopeless to try to establish perfect Communism so soon."

Anymoon stroked his lofty pink forehead.

"We might have procrastinated for ever," he answered, with a laugh of protest. "What progress should we have made if we had been content merely to communise industry in parts? . . . We could have nationalised the railways and the docks and perhaps the shipping and the mines, but the rest of the commercial system would have remained individualistic. . . . Things might have been like that for generations, or perhaps there would have been a reaction. The progressive Socialists, like Snowden and Macdonald, were futile dreamers. . . . No, a great reform must be carried out swiftly. . . . It was thus that we put an end to the monasteries and the Pope and the Stuarts and the boroughmongers."

"But would you proceed in the same way if you had your time to go over again?" she demanded in her low, musical voice.

"Absolutely," he replied confidently. "I don't agree that 'the change in human nature' can only be accomplished by degrees. We tried that at first, when we preserved the *rentier*, and you know how we failed. . . . It is a case for a surgical operation. . . . We must compel the change! . . . To use your own expression, we want a strong central government."

There was a flash of enthusiasm in her kind, diffident eyes, and her sweet smile returned.

"You will have the support of the women," she cried. "They at least are one on the side of efficiency. . . .

Most of them realise that the men are not pulling their weight."

"People like Hothersall would reverse your proposition. . . . And pray, my dear lady, let us have no sex antagonism. . . . It might be the ruin of us."

Mrs. Rhyle's handsome face hardened.

"Discipline is what the idle ca' canny loafers require," she retorted, with a tightening of the lips. "I should love to put them in their proper place."

The look of entreaty deepened upon Anymoon's features.

"And I beg of you not to mention the question of the abolition of marriage in your manifesto. . . . It would be fatal."

Mrs. Rhyle smiled serenely.

"I think I know my own sex too well for that. . . . I bide my time. . . . Let us get our majority first!"

Mrs. Anymoon regarded the growing intimacy between her husband and the leader of the woman's party with considerable disfavour, and she did not fail to tell him her opinion. She was not at all conciliated by his repeated assurances that their alliance was a political necessity.

"I want her votes, my dear," explained the much-harassed President. "I am in a tight corner, and I believe that she will help to get me out of it."

Mrs. Anymoon shook her head with placid scepticism.

"I doubt it. . . . I mistrust women in politics absolutely. . . . If I am to be governed, I prefer to be governed by men. . . . Women are good haters, which is useful, but there's no such word as justice in their vocabulary."

"My dear," protested Anymoon, "you are incorrigibly old-fashioned."

But he realised how much he owed to her affectionate sympathy, and he had the greatest respect for her judgment. So her warning caused him no little uneasiness.

XIII

LIKE every boy at the commencement of the holidays, Mrs. Anymoon's nephew found his newly-acquired leisure a complete and absorbing happiness in itself, and asked for nothing better than to be allowed to walk the streets, free and unrestrained, revelling in the joys of liberty. It was the first time that Douglas had paid a visit to his aunt at St. James's Palace, and the novelty of his surroundings was a continual source of interest to him. Grace, too, who like most healthy-minded girls was fond of the companionship of a schoolboy, went out of her way to entertain him, accompanying him whenever she could spare the time on various expeditions of pleasure.

The momentous General Election took place on the second day after he had left school. It was a short and swift affair, the polling only occupying twelve hours, and the votes were added up and the numbers declared on the following morning. The result was a sweeping victory for Anymoon. With the help of the votes of the women he had obtained a large majority of councillors in all the twenty-two Communes of the Commonwealth. When these newly-elected Communes met as electoral colleges, as they were bound to meet on the next day, it was certain, of course, that they would return twenty-two delegates to the National Council pledged to support the President.

"You see, dear, my expectations have been fulfilled," he cried exultantly to his wife when the last batch of telegrams had come to him in his private apartments in the Palace.

Mrs. Anymoon looked up from her needlework.

"You don't know yet who the twenty-two will be," she replied.

Douglas, who had taken a great interest in the election, walked over quickly from the window-seat.

"Do you mean, aunt, that they'll be all women?" he demanded eagerly.

"You've more foresight than your uncle, Douglas," she answered, with a smile. "Of course they'll be women. . . . All the lot of them."

"My dear," said Anymoon, who was too exhilarated by his success to feel any misgivings, "you underrate my sagacity. . . . I don't care who or what they are as long as they support me. I'm not afraid of women."

. . . . . .

In the filthy splendour of the drawing-room in Berkeley Square, Cohen and his two disciples were discussing the results of the election at the same moment.

"It's time to strike," cried Kinreck, two bright spots in his hollow cheeks. "This is the dawn of tyranny."

Cohen's beard lay upon his chest, and his eyes gleamed fiercely beneath his shaggy brows as he bent across the table. It was not a mean desire for power that inspired him, but his whole soul was filled with a wild yearning for liberty, a heritage of fanaticism, handed down among his race from father to son through long cruel years of oppression.

"The clock-machine is ready," he muttered.

"Bah! there's no need for your clockwork," said Larcey, his thin lips wreathed in a cruel smile.

"But, yes," persisted Cohen. "It will destroy them all. . . . You forget the wedding."

"I forget nothing," returned Larcey. "Anymoon is the villain of the piece, and no one matters but him."

Kinreck's weary blue eyes were bent eagerly upon his leader.

"He's right, Cohen," he said. "Leave the business to us two."

Cohen raised his head slowly and gazed from one colleague to the other with stern, inscrutable features.

"You mean to do it in the Palace?" he demanded, his black eyes resting upon Larcey.

The young man nodded grimly.

"We'll have to get in whether it's to be knife or clock-

machine. . . . And th' first is safest. . . . If your machine missfires there'd be no getting nigh him afterwards."

Cohen plucked at his beard with a fierce smile.

"Very well," he muttered, "you can try your knife. . . . But Kinreck might as well take the machine along and leave it behind you. . . . It's set for twelve hours."

. . . . . .

Two evenings later, Douglas and his aunt went to see the revue at the Empire, which was still playing to crowded houses, for the little comedian, after having been fined and made to apologise for his delinquency of the previous May, had been reinstated in his part and was funnier than ever. It was nearly midnight when they got back to the President's apartments at the Palace, and after a light supper they went off to bed. Anymoon had not yet returned home, being engaged on important business with the chairman of the Metropolitan Commune. The interview between the two was indeed a momentous one, for the result of the voting in the electoral colleges had been as Mrs. Anymoon had foretold, and twenty-one women had been returned as members of the National Council, which was to hold its first meeting on the next day. Sternroyd, Mrs. Rhyle's devoted adherent, was the only man to be elected. For the first time women had chosen to be represented by some of their own sex!

It was a still hot evening, and Douglas sat long at the open window of his room, gazing out into the night. There were no stars visible, for the clouds of a coming thunder-storm had blotted them out long ago. The wide, irregular courtyard beneath was almost buried in darkness, and its turrets and gables could only be discerned faintly against the black sky. On the right, the venerable Tudor façade, with its oriel windows and stern embattlements, could be traced dimly for one-half its length, and a glimpse of the projecting wing opposite, built in Georgian times, with its square casements and straight roof-line, was just visible through the gloom. The tramp of the sentry on guard, as he paced to and

fro outside the arched gateway, was the only sound that could be heard.

Presently, while Douglas was looking out into the darkness, distrait and dreaming, reflecting without regret upon the altered school-life which he had now left behind for ever, he saw a shadow flit along the wall below. There was the murmur of a muffled footfall and another shadow glided swiftly after the first. In an instant the boy was alert and curious, leaning far out of the window, wondering what the stealthy apparitions could portend. A moment later, he heard the tinkle of falling glass and there was a faint clang as though an iron catch had been pushed open. Then, the shadows disappeared one after the other through an aperture in the wall beneath. He realised that two men had forced an entrance into the Palace, and that the wing selected for their purpose was that which contained the apartments of the President. The clock in the Tower was just striking the hour of one.

Scenting adventure with the keen delight of a muscular schoolboy, Douglas drew back from the window, and, moving on tiptoe across the room, he stole quietly out on to the corridor. A light had been left burning, and making his way to the end of the passage he softly descended the staircase to the floor below. He paused and listened. Footsteps, slow and stealthy footsteps, were approaching from the basement. He had no doubt that thieves had broken in to steal. The gleam of a lamp in a bracket on the wall revealed half the length of the narrow gallery, and, as he watched with bated breath, he saw two men slink silently along the wall, one of whom held a gleaming dagger in his hand. There was the glimmer of an electric torch, while for a moment the figures paused. Then a door was pushed open noiselessly and they disappeared into the library, closing the door behind them.

Darting forward after them the boy stood on the threshold outside, listening and irresolute. Since he was aware that the room into which they had entered was

used by his uncle as a study he was convinced that they had come for important State documents, or else that they knew that a large sum of money was kept there.

As he waited he caught the sound of a metallic click, which told him that the intruders had switched on the electric light. The knowledge that the room was no longer in darkness filled him with courage, and he determined that the thieves should not escape with their booty if he could prevent it. But he realised at the same time that he had no one to help him. His uncle had not yet returned, or, since their bedrooms adjoined, he would have heard him, and except his aunt, two women-servants, who slept in a distant wing, were the only living souls in this part of the Palace. By the time that he had opened a window and called to the sentry the robbers would have disappeared. He clenched his fists, feeling in the pride of his youthful strength—for he had won the heavy-weight championship at his school—that he could knock out both ruffians one after the other. Remembering the knife he hesitated an instant, and then, stripping off his jacket, he wrapped it tightly around his right arm.

Turning the handle he flung open the door abruptly. The room within, a spacious apartment lined with book-cases half-way up to the lofty ceiling, was ablaze with light, and, as he halted in the passage, dazzled momentarily by the sudden glare, it seemed to be empty. The long rows of calf-bound volumes danced before his eyes, but there was no sign of the intruders. He made a step forward, pausing by the screen that shielded the doorway, peering eagerly from one end of the room to the other. Suddenly there was the rustle of a footfall, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold when a tall young man with a white, cruel face sprang from behind the screen and hurled himself upon him. A knife flashed in the air.

Instinctively Douglas thrust out his protected arm, and as the blow descended the blade was buried in the folds of his coat. Before his antagonist could withdraw it the boy's left fist shot forward, clean and straight, and the youth with a dagger staggered backwards on to the floor.

At the same instant his companion appeared from his hiding-place behind a long settee. Raising himself on his elbow the half-stunned Larcey gazed fiercely upon his youthful opponent.

"Lock the door, Kinreck," he growled in a hoarse whisper. "Lock the door, you blasted fool. . . . It's only a boy we've got to tackle."

Kinreck, who carried an oblong box of about a foot in length, was endeavouring to push it down within the folds of the upholstery at the back of the settee.

"Lock the door, you idiot," repeated Larcey, struggling to his feet; "I'll keep the chap busy meanwhile."

And with knife in hand he advanced towards Douglas.

Pressing the box deep into the space between the soft cushions Kinreck turned to obey the order of his companion. For a moment Douglas hesitated whether to retreat or to attack this second foe, and while he stood irresolute, with a sickening fear at his heart, Larcey had sprung upon him again. At the same instant Kinreck darted behind and, closing the door noiselessly, turned the key in the lock.

Douglas realised that in another second both the miscreants would be upon him. In desperation he advanced upon Larcey, holding the coat far in front of him so as to parry the blows of the knife, hoping to be able to use his fists once more. Then, as the blade flashed downwards, a sudden inspiration seemed to come to him, and stepping back he kicked with all his might at the descending arm of his antagonist. The boy's boot crashed against Larcey's elbow, and the knife flew out of his hand high into the air, falling against a bookcase on the farther wall, while a wild cry of anguish rang through the room. Before the fellow could make an attempt to defend himself Douglas had felled him to the ground again. He was just in time, for at the same moment Kinreck grappled with him from behind.

Larcey lay upon the floor, groaning in agony, his cruel lips clenched together, his eyes ablaze with murderous frenzy. His right arm hung helplessly at his side.

"Throw him down, Kinreck," he cried, with an oath. Hold him till I'm able to help you."

The fragile Kinreck, however, was no match for the :alwart schoolboy. In a few moments Douglas had verpowered him, and throwing his left arm around his eck he locked his hands together, holding him against is hip, helpless and writhing. With a grin of triumph n his flushed face the boy gazed exultantly on the rostrate Larcey.

"I haven't played football for nothing at school," he ried in a burst of pride.

"Put your teeth into his hands," snarled Larcey. Use your feet, you blighter. . . . He's only a blasted oy."

Douglas tightened his grip admonishingly upon Kinreck's eck.

"He'd better not," he muttered.

"Lemme go," whined Kinreck; "I'll hack you if you on't."

"You try," answered Douglas laconically.

Larcey was sitting up, his face still convulsed with pain, nd his eyes glaring defiance at his conqueror.

"Christ!" he exclaimed, with a snort of rage; "and to hink I've been bested by a boy like that."

Douglas grinned rapturously.

"If it comes to that," he answered, "you're not many ears older yourself"—which was true.

He laid his left hand as he spoke upon the collar of the vrithing Kinreck and held him at arm's length.

"Keep still," he said menacingly, "or I shall have to ick you."

And he wondered what he ought to do next.

At that moment the handle of the door was turned rom outside and someone tried to open it. An impatient nocking followed, in the midst of which he heard his ncle's voice, demanding admittance. Still holding the truggling Kinreck by the scruff of his neck he advanced o turn the key; and, while he did so, Larcey glided wiftly over the carpet on his hands and knees to where

his knife was lying half a dozen yards away at the foot of one of the bookshelves. As he glanced round, with his hand on the door handle, Douglas saw the manœuvre. Dragging his captive with him, he rushed across the room and hurling Kinreck down on the top of his companion he picked up the dagger with a chuckle of triumph. Then he hastened back to the door.

Anymoon stood on the threshold when the door opened, amazed and motionless, a tall, rugged figure in the chiaroscuro of the dark passage beyond, with head erect and his arms swinging loosely at his sides. His defiant blue eyes surveyed the strange scene in wonder.

"What on earth is the matter, Douglas?" he demanded at length, in a tone of petulance.

"I've caught a couple of housebreakers, uncle," answered Douglas proudly, still panting from his recent exertions.

Anymoon gazed sternly upon the two struggling men on the carpet, who were disentangling themselves.

"Get up," he cried abruptly.

Kinreck and Larcey staggered to their feet, the latter caressing his damaged olecranon.

"Who are you?" asked Anymoon impatiently.

"Find out for yourself," growled Larcey, writhing with pain.

"I think they've come after your money," suggested Douglas.

Anymoon walked over to his desk near the window and tried the locked drawer where he kept a few notes and loose cash. It had not been tampered with. Turning again, he gazed reproachfully at Larcey.

"I imagined that this sort of thing was finished with," he remarked sorrowfully. "What need is there to steal now?"

There was no answer.

"Off you go, both of you," said Anymoon, clenching his fists.

"Uncle!" protested Douglas.

"Go at once," repeated Anymoon.

"Oh, please, let me knock their heads together first," pleaded Douglas.

There was a bright light in Anymoon's eyes as he glanced at his nephew, and his firm lips bore the suggestion of a smile.

"Not this time," he answered.

A few moments later, when Larcey and Kinreck had slunk away, Anymoon laid his hand affectionately on the boy's shoulder.

"You have done very well, Douglas," he said warmly. "I am proud of you."

Douglas flushed up to the eyes.

"I was in an awful funk when I saw their knife," he stammered; "I should have bolted if I could have done."

And he showed the dagger to Anymoon.

"There's something in the old public-school system after all," said Anymoon reflectively. "I see how it is that we became a great nation."

He gazed wonderingly at the bold frank face of his nephew.

"One would have imagined that boys nurtured in luxury would have become weak and degenerate," he was thinking; "and likewise one would have expected that boys reared amidst rude and squalid surroundings would have been incomparably braver and more self-reliant. . . . Yet it was not so. . . . It was not a case of repression entirely, for the people were taught that Jack was as good as his master for generations. . . . It's a question of tradition and discipline, and the State will have to be run on such lines. . . . We must level-up."

Meanwhile, Larcey and Kinreck were hurrying along together down Cleveland Row. The former suddenly halted.

"The clock-machine!" he cried; "what have you done with it?"

"That's all right," answered Kinreck; "I put it where none of 'em 'll find it."

Larcey gripped his companion's arm eagerly.

"You set it?"

They were standing beneath a street lamp, and Kinreck pulled out his watch.

"Aye, I set it. . . . And since it's timed for twelve hours it'll go off about half-past one to-morrow."

XIV

At one o'clock on the following morning a small party had assembled in the President's library at St. James's Palace to witness Grace's marriage with Kenneth Darell. It was to be a simple ceremony, celebrated by Father Oldfield, with but a few intimate friends present. Besides the priest, and the bride and bridegroom, there were only Mrs. Anymoon and Douglas, Cyril and Betty, Hothersall and the massive Crannock. Grace wore a simple travelling dress, and no bridesmaid attended her.

The faces of all the little party were filled with dismay, for an unexpected dénouement had occurred. Crannock had just arrived with the startling information that the twenty-two Communes, having met in secret session on the previous evening, had passed a unanimous vote calling upon the National Council to decree the abolition of marriage at their next meeting. And at that very moment the Council, with the President as chairman, was deliberating in another part of the Palace.

"It's outrageous," cried Father Oldfield, his gutta-percha features stern and menacing. "They cannot abrogate a sacrament of the Holy Church."

"They don't care a tinker's curse for the Holy Church," muttered Hothersall.

"They intend that no marriage shall take place without a special licence from the State," said Crannock imperturbably. "They regard the matter entirely from a eugenic point of view."

"But how is it that we did not hear of it before?" demanded Cyril.

"The vote was not passed till midnight," replied Crannock. "The telegrams announcing it did not reach town till this morning."

"Mrs. Rhyle kept the matter secret through fear of public opposition," said Hothersall, who was filled with chagrin because he had failed to be re-elected.

"It's a wicked bit of spite against Grace and Kenneth," exclaimed Betty, almost in tears.

"I think not," said Crannock. "It's merely part of the new programme."

"Still the Council has to reckon with my husband," observed Mrs. Anymoon. "He won't countenance such an absurdity."

"He has only a casting vote," answered Crannock.

"He could threaten to resign," said Cyril angrily.

"That would make matters worse," replied Crannock dismally, thrusting his hands into his pockets. "We should have Mrs. Rhyle as President. . . . No, he mustn't resign."

Father Oldfield waved his arms vehemently.

"Let the ceremony proceed," he bellowed. "I come to administer the law of Christ. . . . The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

"No, Father," said Grace, very white, but resolute. "I will not disobey the law."

"Quick, child, and anticipate it then," cried Mrs. Anymoon. "If you are once married you will be just in the same position as me and my husband."

"I rather fancy that our new masters, or rather mistresses, will pass us all under review," said Crannock, with a grim smile on his hairless face. "We've communised everything. . . . Why not marriage? . . . 'A community of wives' is no more anomalous than the general sharing of property."

"Let the ceremony proceed," roared Father Oldfield. "I will have no truck with those who follow Satan."

"We have no alternative but to wait for the President," said Darell quietly. "We promised him that we would."

"But, my dear fellow," Cyril broke in, "you didn't

know then that this outrageous law was going to be passed."

"We are the President's guests," said Grace firmly. "I wish to wait to hear what he advises us to do."

"Oh, I expect we are all going to be divorced, whether we want to or not," wailed Betty, who was looking very pretty in a new wedding costume.

"Well, the President can't be long now," observed Crannock, glancing at his watch. "It is five minutes past one, and the Council met at eleven o'clock."

"I wish Mrs. Rhyle was a man," murmured Douglas, inordinately bellicose since his adventure of the previous night. "I'd like to punch someone's head."

"Aye, lad," said Hothersall angrily, "and there's plenty of folks as'd be glad to lend a hand there."

The midday sun was streaming through the long windows, and beyond the garden of the Palace, where the flower beds were blazing in autumnal luxuriance, the undulating greenery of the Park was slightly shrouded in the mist of the August noon. In the far distance the faint outline of St. Stephen's Tower could be traced dimly against the grey horizon. A gleam of whiteness through the foliage was all that was revealed of the Horse Guards façade. Not a breath of wind stirred the branches of the trees in the broad avenues. And the little party in the library waited patiently while the hands of the tall clock near the doorway slowly moved towards the quarter.

It was ten minutes past one when Anymoon, dressed in grey frock-coat and trousers, at last strode into the room. All gathered around him eagerly. There was a frown upon his lofty brow and his coarse features were stern and truculent. He stood erect, with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, and a smile passed over Crannock's face as, notwithstanding the costume, he perceived the unmistakable likeness to Cromwell.

"Well?" he demanded, amidst a general silence.

"They have passed their law," the President announced, obviously greatly perturbed, though he managed to

control his feelings. "With the exception of myself the Council was unanimous."

"I denounce them all before God and man," cried Father Oldfield. "I am a priest of the Holy Church and I defy their laws. . . . Those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder."

"They couldn't have been more thorough in their methods," continued Anymoon. "Henceforth it is a felony to perform a marriage without a State licence. . . . The officiating priest and everyone concerned is liable to imprisonment."

"Persecution has no terrors for me," cried Father Oldfield. "I would welcome martyrdom."

"And what of existing marriages?" inquired Grace calmly.

"A new department is to be set up to revise them," answered Anymoon. "Licences are to be issued by the Government."

"So even our affections are to be the subject of State control," said Mrs. Anymoon scornfully.

"I saw that it was coming, but I did not think it would come so soon," said Crannock, his lemon-coloured face full of gloom, as he thought wistfully of his little sharp-featured wife at home.

"Mrs. Rhyle has not behaved fairly," continued the deluded President. "She pledged me her word that this matter should be shelved indefinitely. . . . Her excuse is that her hand has been forced by the Communes."

"Pack of women!" growled Hothersall. "They'll want to tuck us up in bed every night."

"Well, the country won't stand it," observed Crannock. "They'll be beaten at the polls next summer."

"It'll take two years at least to get a majority against 'em," said Hothersall. "Only a third of the Communes retire each year, bear in mind."

"And we have to reckon with the strength of their party machine," added Anymoon gloomily.

"We mun have no more coalitions with them unsexed females," growled Hothersall. "You stick where you are,

Anymoon, my lad, and we'll lick 'em to a frazzle when our time comes."

"The Holy Father shall excommunicate them all," exclaimed Father Oldfield.

"A fat lot they'll mind," retorted the irreverent Hothersall.

"There is no use our discussing the matter any further," said Grace, with bowed head, but brave and self-possessed still. "I am very grateful to you all for your sympathy, but you can do nothing. . . . Indeed, most of you are in the same unhappy position as Kenneth and myself."

"Except we've had a bit of a run for our money, miss," said Hothersall, "before this thing came."

"The marriage cannot take place," continued Grace, her lips trembling a little, turning to her lover; "don't you agree, Kenneth?"

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Darell bitterly.

"Come, Betty darling, let us go into the garden," said Grace, turning to her friend. "It will be nice to get some air."

And the two girls, followed by Mrs. Anymoon, stole quietly from the room.

"I protest," roared Father Oldfield. "This is truckling to their accursed secularism. . . . I will denounce these profligates in the sight of the whole world."

"Yon woman ought to be flogged," exclaimed Hothersall.

"I want you to come with me to see the chairman of the Metropolitan Commune, Darell," said Anymoon. "A requisition from the minority may have some effect. . . . I've managed to retain you as my secretary, you know."

"By gum," said Hothersall, looking at the clock, "it's nearly half-past one. . . . I'll be after getting a bit of lunch."

"I refuse to stir," shouted Father Oldfield, waving his arms. "It is possible that those young people, on reflection, may have need of me."

The imperturbable Crannock laid his hand upon the arm of the mercurial priest.

"Miss Dalrymple will not change her mind, Father," he said kindly. "A shrewd judge of human nature like yourself must know that."

Anymoon had disappeared with Darell, and one by one the disappointed guests walked slowly from the room, Father Oldfield, babbling anathemas against the new Council, suffering the sympathetic Crannock to lead him away. Cyril, the last to leave, walked down the corridor beside Hothersall.

"What have you done with your old furniture?" he inquired, smoothing his curly flaxen hair. "It won't hold its value, I fancy."

Hothersall jerked forward his crisp brown beard, and laying his finger against his nose, winked slyly at his companion.

"I sold every stick of it to the Yankees," he chuckled. "The whole bally lot's on the high seas at this very moment. . . . And more than that, I've banked the money in New York."

"That's real cute of you," said Cyril approvingly.

"Ee, lad," replied Hothersall, "you don't catch many weasels asleep i' Lancashire."

Outside in the Mall, crouched against the walls of the Palace, Larcey and Kinreck were waiting expectantly. The former held his watch in his hand.

"It's more than half-past," he muttered. "I wonder if it's gone wrong."

Suddenly there was a terrific explosion within the old building, and the two high windows of the President's library were blown outwards, smashed to matchwood. For an instant the room was illumined by a fiery flame. When the smoke cleared away, those in the garden could see that a great hole was gaping in the roof.

"They've all gone to glory," cried Kinreck exultantly.

An hour later, when the evening papers appeared, the two conspirators learnt to their chagrin that the room was empty.

PART III

PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT

I

A YEAR had elapsed since the women, by reason of their numerical superiority and their coalition with the President, had made their valiant attempt to rescue the nation from the anarchy into which it had been drifting. Mrs. Rhyle's manifesto on the eve of the General Election had been moderate and reasonable. It being obvious that discipline was imperative, she had appealed to her sex in the name of discipline ; and since untidiness of every kind is repugnant to the nature of the average woman, they had responded enthusiastically to the invocation. For the first time there was almost perfect unanimity amongst them, nearly everyone being disappointed that the striving after equality had not had more satisfactory results. Moreover, the spirit of unrest prevailed still, and all were inspired with a feverish craving for change.

In one particular, however, nobody wished for change. Anymoon continued to be President. The belief that he had been the victim of attempted assassination had made him, like Pisistratus, more popular than ever before, and, since his presence did not thwart her plans, Mrs. Rhyle was content that he should remain the figure-head of the Commonwealth. With the women-councillors, too, he was a favourite, for they were gratified by his tactful deference towards them, besides preferring a man as their chairman rather than one of their own sex. So it seemed

as though he would retain his office permanently, an unsinkable politician with as many lives as a cat.

The trustful people, who had cast their votes against the old tyranny of sloppiness and inefficiency, soon discovered that they had been instrumental in setting up a tyranny that was even more unpleasant. Just as the frogs in the fable, they found that they had exchanged King Log for King Stork. The extremist has a knack of rising to the top like cream, and immediately the disciples of Mrs. Rhyle found themselves firmly seated in the saddle they set about using both whip and spur. Nothing but a complete remodelling of the universe seemed likely to content them. They wanted the earth.

Nevertheless, the policy of Mrs. Rhyle was perfectly consistent. An ardent and a logical Socialist, she founded her theory of government upon the self-evident proposition that *Socialism implies the absolute subordination of the individual to the State.* Anymoon's attempt in the first instance to introduce a gradual and progressive Communism, in which he had endeavoured to bring about "a change of heart" amongst the citizens by degrees, had had to be abandoned at the end of two years. Likewise his experiment of root-and-branch Socialism had brought the nation to the verge of bankruptcy. In the opinion of the new women, the reasons of the dual failure were obvious. It was not that the machinery that should have provided the driving-power was defective. In theory, the establishment of a federation of Local Communes under the control of a National Council was as near perfection as any paper constitution can ever be, and it seemed admirably suitable to the temperament of the British race. Mrs. Rhyle had not the slightest doubt why the subordination of the individual to the State had not yet been accomplished. It was all the fault of the men!

In the heart of almost every woman—and very properly so, too—there is a deeply-rooted conviction that nature has intended man to be a beast of burden. The "clinging" portion of the sex expects that his share of

the work shall be in direct ratio to his superiority in muscle. Those who do not "cling" believe that nature has been over-bounteous to him from a physical point of view and that the law of Equivalent Compensation demands that he shall indemnify them by the sweat of his brow. The new women soon made up their minds that the first most necessary and paramount reform was to put the men into their proper place. Their methods showed the usual feminine thoroughness in such matters. In her attitude towards the nation Mrs. Rhyle behaved pretty much as an exacting housewife who has come into command of a new establishment, where slackness and extravagance have hitherto been rife. She dispensed discipline with an iron hand, and the male portion of the community, being less amenable and more prone to licence, came in for most of the coercion.

The scandal of ca' canny, for which the men had always been more responsible than the women, was dealt with in a drastic manner by a system of fines and imprisonment. Shoddy work was not paid for and the delinquent was compelled to do it over again. Malingering and idleness were made a criminal offence. Wilful waste was put an end to in the same manner. The hours of work were raised from thirty-two to forty hours a week. And although a herd of new task-masters, who naturally were extremely unpopular, had to be enrolled in order to effect these reformations, the result appeared to justify the means. At the end of twelve months trade had begun to revive and the national balance sheet no longer showed a deficit. The value of money had risen, while prices had shrunk to reasonable limits.

Naturally, the new women did not omit to deal with the drink traffic. Hitherto the law had remained exactly as it was during the Great War, the sale of alcohol being permitted during certain hours of the day. Immediately after the General Election, however, a requisition had been forwarded by the Communes to the National Council, demanding that no drink should be sold after six o'clock at night, and the Council in response, on the motion of

Mrs. Rhyle herself, had decreed absolute prohibition throughout the whole Commonwealth. Thousands of brewers, maltsters and distillers lost their jobs, and another great reshuffling became necessary.

The reform was greeted by an outburst of popular indignation, but its advocates retorted that a similar law prevailed in the States of America, and despite opposition the decree was enforced all over the land. By a crafty expedient Mrs. Rhyle managed to obtain the sympathy and co-operation of the entire police force, thereby making it possible to carry her proposals into effect. A canteen was permitted in every police-station, and each officer was allowed two free pints of ale a day as well as one glass of whisky. At first, some of the extreme women had insisted that the ration of beer should be restricted to a gill; but they had been persuaded at last that the throat of a policeman, like his boots, is impervious to a little wet. Consequently, there was a rush of recruits to join the force.

In order to conciliate another formidable body of men, a similar concession was granted to the soldiers of the National Service. Recently, for the sake of economy, a large number of the elder officers of this force had been dismissed, but any disaffection that might have arisen in consequence was prevented by generous promotions and a slight increase of pay for those who were retained in their commands. Like a discreet woman, Mrs. Rhyle was resolved to leave nothing to chance, it being essential that all the forces of law and order should be on her side.

For, as was inevitable, in spite of the increased efficiency there was almost as great dissatisfaction in the country as there had been before the women came into power. Although Communism had been carried to its utmost limits, there was no universal equality and jealousy was still as prevalent as ever. The system of fines, which was practically another form of payment by results, had assisted the uneven distribution of wealth. Some workmen had their wages docked each week, while others always drew full pay. The improvident were invariably

impecunious; the thrifty kept a well-filled stocking. Often enough the incorrigible spendthrift would sell both his furniture and the clothes off his back in order to provide the wherewithal for expensive junketings.

Another national valuation of furniture and household possessions had been carried out immediately after the General Election in order to checkmate the activities of astute and enterprising individuals like Hothersall, and surplus stocks had been appropriated by the State. But this measure had resulted in a mere reshuffling of the cards. The State was bound to disperse these possessions lest they should be eating their heads off, and well-salaried officials had fresh opportunities of picking up bargains at knock-out prices. Theoretically, Mrs. Rhyle and her followers did not object to such a state of things. They were never weary of reiterating that "Socialism does not aim at the abolition of private property." One fact alone caused them uneasiness. The people as a whole, being imbued with the idea that perfect Communism meant "share and share alike," were deeply incensed because it was still possible for "the poor to become poorer and the rich richer." And it was idle to point out to them that it was only the lazy and improvident who became poorer and the thrifty and industrious who became richer. "This was just as it used to be," the grumblers retorted, "in the bad old days of competition!"

In consequence of the universal hostility to the well-paid managers and officials—for the bureaucracy was more stupendous than ever—there had been a slight reduction of salaries as a sop to Cerberus. In another of the high-pitched manifestoes, in which she excelled, Mrs. Rhyle made an impassioned invocation to "the men of exceptional ability," as she very appropriately called them, appealing to their public spirit, beseeching them to labour all the harder for the welfare of the State on their reduced pay. Some of them replied to her in a personal letter, assuring her that as far as they were concerned the loss of income would not lessen their endeavours, but hinting that such parsimony might have

a deterrent effect upon the younger generation, who otherwise might have striven to rise above the ruck and step into their shoes.

Thus Mrs. Rhyle's iron-handed and well-intentioned endeavours to create an ideal communistic State had been as abortive—as far as the achievement of universal happiness was concerned—as every attempt to drive out nature with a pitch-fork must always be. By sledge-hammer blows some sort of efficiency had been established, but so far there had been no "change of heart." Human nature continued the same as it was before, and apparently there seemed no prospect of its metamorphosis.

II

It was at the beginning of August that Mrs. Rhyle, after twelve months' tenure of office, made her first annual report upon the administration of the new Act of Sexual Relationship, which had put an end to "the holy state of matrimony" in the previous year. The masterful lady was now styled the Premier, a title selected by herself. When she had announced her intention of assuming it, Mr. Sternroyd, her devoted admirer, had suggested the feminine *Première* as being more appropriate; but, with a meek reproachful smile, which was more withering than the most scornful glance, she had rejected it as suggestive of the opera house.

Anymoon presided at the Council table with all his old skill and exuberance, apparently having lost nothing of his self-confidence with his diminution of actual power. Indeed, the twenty-one stern-faced ladies who sat around the green cloth were pleased to preserve the fiction that the President was an autocrat, finding it convenient to use him as a stalking-horse behind whom they might pursue their machinations. His wit, perhaps, had less verbal subtlety than formerly and was more identified

with material details, for women as a rule are most fond of the humour that is objective, and are more appreciative of pantomime than of terminology. His blue eyes still wore their old look of defiance, and his rugged, fresh-coloured features were as resolute as ever. He had a pink carnation in his button-hole and his light-grey frock-coat was of immaculate contour. During the last twelve months he had shown much greater fastidiousness in attire, which had been a source of tribulation to the tailors of Grade Number One in Savile Row.

Mrs. Rhyle arose with a sheaf of notes, and Darell, seated as before on the left of the President, exchanged a glance of mutual sympathy with his chief. Brushing his hand impatiently over his dark moustache, he bent over his minute-book with a frown. With reason, he was far less tolerant of the regiment of women than Anymoon.

"Mr. President," began Mrs. Rhyle, with a meek smile and the look of diffidence in her eyes, "after a year's trial we may pronounce the Act of Sex Relationship to have been a complete success. . . . The most priceless asset that any nation can possess is a strong and healthy race of children. . . . That we shall accomplish. . . . Before any couple can be permitted to reproduce their species, a medical certificate, giving both the man and the woman a clean bill of health, must be obtained from the State."

She turned sweetly to Kenneth Darell with her most persuasive smile.

"Even you, Mr. Darell, will allow that this was a beneficent reform?"

Darell inclined his head.

"Yes, madam," he answered, with a resentful light in his dark eyes, "but it could have been carried into effect by a by-law without tampering with the institution of marriage."

Besides the three shorthand clerks, who did not count and whose backs, moreover, were turned to the baize table, and Mr. Sternroyd, who counted even less in the

eyes of the women, since they knew that he would eat out of any of their hands, Darell and the President were the only men in the room. So the former, whom no one could mistake for anything but a man, was often drawn into their discussions by some of the lady councillors; for all women, both masculine and feminine, can seldom resist an opportunity of soliciting the approval of one of the opposite sex.

"The marriage ceremony was always a useless form," continued Mrs. Rhyle, with a gentle sigh. "The one essential requirement is State sanction. . . . It is not a religious ceremony which constitutes a marriage . . . but a physical fact. And so a service in a church is as much out of date as the mid-Victorian maiden who believed that hymns and orange blossom and bridesmaids were the whole sum and substance of marriage. . . . But if any legally-licensed couple want a religious ceremony they are still free to get a priest or a presbyter or a patriarch to mumble the words to them."

"Still, such a ceremony does not make it a legal union," said Darell.

"Of course not," answered Mrs. Rhyle. "The State must reserve the right to cancel the contract if it should be expedient owing to disease or barrenness or failure to produce healthy offspring. . . . In short, we believe that no Church should interfere in the procreation of children."

"If the old Italian novelists speak the truth, it used to interfere most effectively in the days of the monks," observed Anymoon, conscious, nevertheless, that the jest was a cheap one.

But several women, who were familiar with certain publications of Messrs. Lawrence and Bullen, smiled broadly.

"You have made alterations in the marriage laws which no Church can sanction," said Darell, with a frown upon his expressive face as he thought of his own unhappy situation.

"That was our object," answered Mrs. Rhyle, with a

wave of the soft white hand that wielded such remorseless power. "We are all 'on the panel' now, and since the State has made itself wholly responsible for the health of the existing community, it follows as a logical consequence that it must make itself responsible also for the welfare of the generations to come. . . . We might as well have every man his own doctor, instead of a national faculty with compulsory powers, as permit the individual to beget children indiscriminately. . . . I shudder when I think of the promiscuous breeding in the past, with the priest as pander, and the so-called holy state of matrimony as a condition of unhygienic fornication."

There was an answering murmur of feminine applause, above which Mr. Sternroyd's high-pitched voice piped a tremulous "Hear, hear."

"The abolition of marriage has placed woman for the first time on a sexual equality with man," resumed Mrs. Rhyle, with shining eyes. "It has uplifted the unmarried mother and it has removed the stigma of the old maid. Both the male and the female organisms are placed on the same plane. Man's love of man's life is no longer a thing apart and woman's whole existence. . . . Those degrading concessions, the ring and the marriage lines, do not exist. . . . A woman may now choose one lover after another, as a man always could, without loss of social prestige."

"I understand that many have attached a fine array of scalps to their girdles already," said Anymoon, making another unworthy jest.

"Yes, woman is as free to mate as the birds," continued Mrs. Rhyle, with an ethereal smile. "It is only when she wishes to produce a child that she and her paramour must obtain a licence from their panel doctor and the Sexual Relationship Board. . . . Here our penalties have had to be rigorous. . . . For the first unlicensed baby we impose a fine upon both parents of one half of their annual salary; for a second offence the punishment is a year's imprisonment. . . . I regret that several thousands of our fellow-citizens have already had to suffer the first penalty, but I

hope and believe that the severity of the law will have a deterrent effect and that incarceration will be necessary in very few instances."

"It ought not to be," said Sternroyd, blinking sheepishly through his pince-nez. "It is merely a question of taking reasonable precaution."

"Exactly, Mr. Sternroyd," replied Mrs. Rhyle, with a glance of approval at her devoted adherent. "But human nature is essentially careless."

"I must protest against this unbridled lechery," interposed a rosy-cheeked lady at the bottom of the table. "I am in favour of State licence in place of marriage, but I think we should take some steps to prevent indiscriminate harlotry."

"And where are you going to draw the line?" demanded Mrs. Rhyle, with a slight inflection of cynicism in her silvery voice. "Having abolished marriage, you must allow the free intercourse of the sexes. . . . It would be tyrannical and inexpedient to enforce restrictions except when such intercourse affects the welfare of the State. . . . No, the State can only interfere in the matter of children. . . . Here, we are within the limits of practical politics."

"And we should make the greatest possible concessions for the sake of liberty," added Mr. Sternroyd.

"Precisely," said Mrs. Rhyle. "Not only have our reforms established sexual equality as between man and woman, but we have made women themselves equal one to another. . . . . The married can no longer despise the unmarried. . . . The monandric have no reason to look down upon the polygamist. . . . We have put an end to such anomalies as the courtesan and the mistress and the divorcee. . . . Surely we have accomplished a most beneficent reform. . . . At last women are free and equal!"

"Some will have more babies than others," remarked the rosy-faced woman dryly.

"My dear lady," retorted Mrs. Rhyle, with her sweetest smile, "we have not yet succeeded in harnessing nature

to our chariot wheels. . . . The prolific must make up for the deficiencies of the sterile, and the law of Equivalent Compensation will recompense each according to her merit."

"You have put an end to the family," said Darell.

"No," answered Mrs. Rhyle. "The parents, if they wish, may still keep their children. . . . I admit that the establishment of national crèches and nursery schools has made the home unnecessary, and I am convinced that the State will prove an ideal foster-mother—infinitely more humane and efficient, indeed, than the real mother. . . . It is another case where national organisation is superior to individual management. . . . In no other way can you have perfect equality."

"Is it necessary to seek perfect equality?" remarked Anymoon, with Socratic inquisitiveness.

"If there is any truth in our initial premises, surely that is the goal we must seek," answered Mrs. Rhyle.

"There is one point upon which I want enlightenment," said the egregious Sternroyd. "How far has infanticide been necessary?"

"In very few cases," responded Mrs. Rhyle, with tears in her eyes. "When it is obvious that the poor baby must grow up a weakling, it is more humane to put the poor little mortal to sleep. . . . Besides, it is against the interests of the State to rear unhealthy children."

"Bacon, Newton and Nelson would all have been nipped in the bud," said Darell, "had the same system been in force when they were born."

"Then we might have had no Shakespeare!" remarked Anymoon, as solemn as a judge.

"You are wrong, Mr. Darell," answered the unruffled Mrs. Rhyle. "Our medical board is most capable, and the greatest care is taken in each diagnosis. . . . I have only one more matter to speak of before I read to you my report upon the last twelve months' working of the Act. . . . It has been said by our enemies that the Government is hostile to religion. . . . That is not true. . . . As I have pointed out previously, any couple who obtain a

cohabitation licence from the Government may also, if it pleases them, go through any religious ceremony they like. . . . The State is perfectly fair and just to every denomination. . . . For example, in Westminster Cathedral this very morning the Christian Scientists held a service before the Catholic mass and the Theosophists had a meeting there immediately afterwards. . . . The Commonwealth holds the ecclesiastic buildings in trust for the whole nation without distinction of creed."

III

When at last the Council had dispersed, Kenneth Darell walked across to the President's apartments, for the estimable Mrs. Anymoon had invited him to tea and had asked Grace to meet him. Both the young people were as fond of each other as ever, but neither could consent to a marriage on the terms at present sanctioned by the State, and they lived in hope that sooner or later a Government would come into power which had not a perverse passion for uniformity. Scarcely were the three seated around the table when the door of the library opened again and the maid ushered in Mrs. Rhyle.

"I am so weary after talking so much that I've come to beg of you to give me a cup of tea," she observed, beaming upon the company impartially.

Mrs. Anymoon, looking particularly stately and placid in a dark-green robe of the Liberty species, leant back with a soft sigh of resignation. Darell had risen and offered Mrs. Rhyle a chair.

"Our sex often tire themselves out thus, I fear," Mrs. Anymoon remarked, with a tiny glint in her serene eyes.

"Men are quite as voluble," said Mrs. Rhyle, with a sweet smile, but her glance met that of her hostess unflinchingly. "Oh, I am so disappointed," she continued,

as she sank into her chair. "I hoped that the President would be here. . . . I wanted to talk to him."

There was a slight tremor in Mrs. Anymoon's plump white throat.

"Personally I don't like to worry him with shop out of business hours," she said, the apologetic tone in her voice being a trifle over-emphasised.

Mrs. Rhyle turned quickly, but her face expressed nothing but amiability.

"I am anxious," she replied, with a little sigh, "and naturally the poor President must be involved in all my anxieties. . . . There are many difficult problems still to be solved. . . . They seem to increase with every step forward that we take."

"Alps on alps arise," muttered Darell. "It will be so till you tumble over the precipice."

Mrs. Rhyle, with whom he was a favourite, shook her finger at him in mock reproach.

"Oh, you mediæval person! . . . But you will admit that the nation is a better time-keeper since the women took to winding it up?"

"Yes, the new State has to be continually wound up. . . . The old one worked automatically."

"As long as you have capable winders the new machinery is less likely to get out of order."

Darell shook his head.

"The old State rested upon natural laws, which must be the basis of all human institutions. . . . There must be a struggle for existence if society is to progress. . . . To remedy the ancient injustices a few by-laws only were necessary—better housing and sanitation, a more elastic system of education in which specialisation should have played the most important part, and payment by results on a generous scale. . . . Our reforms should have begun at the bottom instead of at the top. We ought to have levelled-up."

Mrs. Rhyle lowered her eyes with a sad little sigh.

"The whole edifice was rotten and had to be pulled down . . . so we had to begin at the top."

"And you find the building up again some job," said Mrs. Anymoon complacently.

Mrs. Rhyle sipped her tea and smiled again.

"The structure is all right . . . it is the people who live in it who are the trouble."

Mrs. Anymoon's face hardened.

"Because you worry them so. . . . Why don't you leave them alone?"

"Indeed, my friend, I wish we could. . . . But the essence of Communism is discipline. . . . Let me tell you a little story of bad citizenship. . . . A few weeks ago a mechanic in the Midlands and his two grown-up daughters were carried away by influenza. . . . There were four in the family, and each of them—the father and the mother and the two girls—had earned the standard wage of a pound a day for three whole years. . . . Apparently, they had lived well and enjoyed themselves, but a government registrar, who visited their little flat to certify the deaths, discovered that the widow was in possession of a hoard of more than three thousand pounds in notes and cash. . . . How can we hope to preserve equality under such circumstances!"

Mrs. Anymoon smiled.

"To hoard is a natural instinct. Why should you object to these nest-eggs? . . . They cannot get any interest on them."

"Indeed they can. . . . The man in question had been a money-lender—a prevalent vice. . . . Moreover, these savings are being smuggled abroad and invested in other countries. . . . Scores of merchant seamen are aiding this illicit traffic."

"You must forbid emigration, so people cannot follow their money."

"How is that possible in these days of aviation? . . . Anyone can steal an airship and be in Germany in three hours. . . . Some of our highly-paid officials have thousands of pounds secreted abroad. . . . This drain of wealth will affect the nation very seriously in time."

"You must build up a secret service to checkmate it,"

said Darell mischievously. "It is certainly a menace to equality."

"Logically, you cannot condemn this hoarding," observed Mrs. Anymoon. "If you permit a man to earn money, he ought to be allowed to save or to spend it just as he chooses; and if he saves it, there is no reason why he should not bequeath it."

"Unless we check hoarding, we shall have rich and poor again in a few generations," replied Mrs. Rhyle. "To my mind, the remedy is an obvious one. . . . We must abolish money altogether. . . . There is no truer maxim than that it is the root of all evil."

"Then we shall have rations and coupons once more," remarked Grace.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Rhyle. "It is the only way to attain an ideal Communism. . . . We have a splendid precedent for it, and it worked without a hitch. . . . I hope to ration everything—food and dress and travel and amusements! . . . Everyone will receive the weekly wage in the form of a book instead of in notes and gold."

"I wonder if the people would like it," said Grace, lifting her brows.

"They will soon get used to their coupons as they did before. . . . There will be no grumbling, as the scale will be a most generous one. . . . Of course, the coupons will be terminable."

"That would be absolute equality indeed," said Mrs. Anymoon. "Do have another piece of cake. . . . I am one slice ahead of you."

"It might be well to let the people have a taste of complete Communism," said Darell reflectively. "They are certainly not satisfied with their present condition. . . . Everyone thinks it unjust that anyone should be better off than himself. . . . There is discontent because work is as hard as it ever was even though there is more leisure. . . . In fact, the nation was led to believe that Utopia was in sight, and it is disappointed."

"Of course it will take generations to obtain a perfect result," answered Mrs. Rhyle sadly.

Later, when Grace and Darell had gone for a walk, Mrs. Anymoon turned to her visitor with a look of reproach.

"Don't you think it is hard lines that those two poor young things cannot be married?" she observed impatiently.

"It's their own fault, surely," replied Mrs. Rhyle in her most silvery tones. "They could apply to the Board of Sexual Relationship for a licence. They should have no difficulty in satisfying the requirements. . . . It would be the same thing as marriage."

"To have and to hold in health but not in sickness, according to State regulations," retorted Mrs. Anymoon. "When either had most need of the other they would be parted."

"The nation cannot run the risk of begetting unhealthy children," answered Mrs. Rhyle calmly. "If one of them had a serious complaint their panel doctor would have to report it."

"By the by," said Mrs. Anymoon, when her unwelcome guest at length rose to depart, "when you introduce your system of universal rationing, I suppose that all your licensed couples will have to be provided with a special book of coupons?"

Mrs. Rhyle smiled sweetly in response, but made no comment upon the cynicism.

IV

A FEW months later, about the middle of November, the epicurean David, who used to inhabit the same tenement house in Deptford as Kinreck and Larcey, set out one morning with a waggon of coals from the station-yard of what used to be one of the prettiest villages in Surrey. During the previous year both he and his fellow-lodger Hodson had been deported from London and assigned their present job.

"Yer can't call yer blessed soul yer own now," he growled, as he led the horses through the gate of the yard. "Won't even let yer smoke while yer work. . . . Them women 'll be stopping baccy next."

"Well, there were never much pleasure in a pipe except when you could sit over it," returned the philosophic Hodson, who, though less of an enthusiast than formerly, was still a professed Socialist.

"I'm not sorry they've given us these coupons," said David, who since the prohibition of alcohol had been perhaps the most miserable man in England. "There was nothing yer could spend yer money on."

"What about the Cinema theatre?" retorted Hodson. "There weren't anything of that sort in a little village like this in the dull old times!"

David expectorated contemptuously, an angry frown upon his crimson face.

"Bah! Give me a snug bar-parlour any day. . . . Besides, one soon gets fed-up with the kind of pictures they show us. . . . I like to see murders and gals run away with. . . . But they don't have that sort now. . . . And why? 'Cos they know they ain't possible nowadays."

"Of course there's like to be less variety when folks are almost all the same class. . . . We were compelled to put an end to the idle rich."

"I never see'd no harm in rich folk. . . . I used to earn good money and I ne'er envied 'em, for I'd a far sight better time myself when I were let alone. . . . Besides, I might have blossomed into one of 'em afore I 'opped it."

"But think of all the clothes you can get now. . . . Was ever a working-man dressed so well before?"

"A couple of suits is enough for any fellow. . . . A chap isn't a blinking peacock. . . . And mark my words, we'll all be made to dress like as like in a bit. . . . They're always afraid as how someone is treading on someone else's corns."

They descended the winding road towards the village

in the valley. The famous lanes, which formerly were lined with hawthorn hedges and banks of wild flowers, sweeping beneath tall avenues of beech and elm trees, were now shorn of all their beauty, and a wire fence bordered them on either side. Every inch of the undulating landscape, cut up into broad square spaces like some gigantic chess-board, with every copse and cover uprooted from its surface as though they had been weeds, had been appropriated for cultivation. Not a yard of ground could be spared for the sake of æsthetics. The man who could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass grow where a wood or a mere had stood previously was thought to deserve better of mankind than the whole race of landscape gardeners put together. A similar ruthlessness had obliterated the sweet old-world hamlet which had clustered along the banks of the little river. The evil eye of official architects had fallen upon its creeper-clad cottages and sentence of death had been pronounced without the semblance of a trial. *Sanitas sanitatum*, they must all make way for hygienic bricks and mortar! So rows of factory-like dwelling-places, erected under Government auspices, had arisen in their stead.

The graceful Tudor bridge, too slender for modern traffic, had been superseded by a steel and iron thing that was painted a brilliant red, and the village street, where a strip of grass used to fringe the gutters, was curbed and channelled throughout its length. From end to end a garish façade of red brick bordered it on either side. The seventeenth-century inn, along with the venerable elm that shaded its picturesque gables, had been demolished, and the communal eating-house, designed by the artist who built the board-school, had arisen on the same site. Progress had spared only the old Norman church, for its peal of bells was useful to summon the people to their daily meals, and it was large enough to contain nearly all the inhabitants when a Government lecturer chanced to pay a visit. A potato-patch, where once the ancient gravestones stood, surrounded it.

Along the slopes of the valley, covered not so long ago with hanging woods, stretched the wide green and brown vista of bare fields, broadening into the spacious chess-board that reached on all sides as far as the horizon. The whole land was like a shorn lamb, and God had certainly not tempered the wind to it.

It was nearly three o'clock before David and Hodson had finished their morning rounds, and, leaving their horses with their nose-bags in the little square outside the communal eating-house, they hurried within for their dinners. The large room was almost empty, and a small waitress with a snub nose looked up resentfully from her newspaper as they entered.

"Why can't you fellows be in time?" she snapped.

"'Cos we've got our work to do," growled David, throwing himself upon a bench and resting his elbows on the table. "Look sharp and bring us some food."

"So've I got me work, and it's my dinner-hour, let me tell you," retorted the waitress, "and I've a jolly good mind to mike you wite."

"Ho, indeed," said David. "Then I'll have a word with the manageress."

"Well, you can't have any fish, for it's off," answered the waitress, capitulating. "There's roast beef, potatoes and greens, plum pudding and cheese . . . and see you're both in time ter-morrow, and wash yer 'ands before you come. . . . Got yer coupons?"

"The meat's as cold as a corpse," snarled David, surveying the patches of greasy gravy on his plate with a grimace, "and the potatoes are as hard as nails. . . . I expect the pudding 'll be like leather too."

"It's odd, they can't keep up to the mark with their cooking," said Hodson reflectively. "The communal kitchens were A1 during the war."

"Aye, but folks were all patriotic then," replied David contemptuously. "We was out to beat the 'Un . . . but these blinking cooks and waitresses nowadays don't care a hang for the B.P. . . . They're

out to make it as soft a job as they can for theirselves—the perishers."

"That's the trouble," said Hodson. "It's everyone for himself still."

"I'd less choice of vict'als, p'raps, when my old woman used to fend for me," said David, "but it was better eating, and I could have it in comfort at home."

"Yes, there's nothing to grumble at in the quantity," observed Hodson philosophically, "and you'll see things 'll work themselves right in time."

"Gawd!" exclaimed David, with a sigh, "I could neck a quart of ale."

An hour later the pair had finished their work for the day, and having stabled his horses David strolled out into a field near the station-yard with a fox-terrier at his heels. Making his way to a hayrick close to the roadside he pulled a ferret from his pocket and pushed it into a hole at the bottom of the stack. He had capital sport this evening. Rat after rat bolted from its lair, and his dog never failed to kill each time. In the excitement of the chase he was beginning to forget his innumerable grievances. Suddenly, in the gathering twilight, a chubby, inquisitive face topped by a policeman's helmet appeared above the hedge.

"Are you a licensed rat-catcher?" piped a shrill voice.

"Nawe," said David, with a deep intake of breath, "I hain't."

The policewoman surveyed him reproachfully.

"Then why do you allow your dog to kill rats?"

David began to stammer incoherently.

"It's only a bit of fun, missis."

"You know it's against the law to kill anything for fun. . . . What's the good of preventing hunting and shooting for pleasure if fellows like you go about killing rats? . . . I shall report you."

And she pulled out her notebook as she spoke.

"That's 'arf rations for a week," muttered David, when the policewoman had disappeared. "Gawd! And to think that I could have taken yon female by the scruff

of her neck and tossed her over the 'ayrick. . . . It's a mucking world."

At half-past five he was sitting at tea with Hodson in the common-room of the tenement house in which they both lived. The repast was a little more ample than that to which he had been accustomed before the Great Upheaval, but he would have preferred to have chosen the menu himself.

"'Ow are we going to get through the bloody evening?" he demanded, with a dismal frown.

"I'm off to the Free Library," answered Hodson cheerily.

"I 'ate blasted books," grumbled David, "and there are no pubs left, and I see no sense in playing cards or dominoes now we've ration-tickets instead of chink. . . . I should like to know what a beggar can do."

"You'll have to mate with some young woman for the sake of company."

"Ga'on! . . . What gal would ever think twice about an old ruin like me? . . . Besides, I'd never get a licence, and something turible happens to yer if you have a baby when you're over fifty."

"Work and books keep me busy from morning till night," said Hodson, rising; "I've a contented mind."

"I'll come along with you," said David. "It'll have to be the Cinema for me arter all. . . . It's better nor sitting here staring into the fire. . . . But I wish they didn't bar all the pictures that show what life used to be like in good old England."

They strolled down the village street through the misty winter night. There was the sound of music within the communal restaurant, and through the brightly-lit windows they could see a crowd of merry dancers whirling round the room. Hodson touched his companion's arm.

"Why don't you join them?" he suggested, with a smile.

"What! me? . . . And at my time of life?"

"And why not? . . . They're short of men still. . . . You want something to kill time."

David shook his head dismally.

"I'm too old. . . . No gal would look at me now. . . . But there was a time when I could foot it with the best of 'em."

The optimistic Hodson surveyed the crowded ball-room sympathetically.

"It was a good notion to let the young folks dance. . . . It's fine to think that there's a roomful like that in every village in the land. . . . And they need only a fiddle and a piano to keep them going. . . . And we owe it to Mr. Kenneth Darell, who suggested it to the Council. . . . It was a fine piece of Socialism."

"Socialism!" muttered David. "If there'd been dancing all over the kingdom five years ago, folks'd have felt too happy and content to care a hang for your cursed Socialism."

During the whole of the next day David was wonderfully cheerful. At tea-time he turned to Hodson with a face full of roguish mystery.

"I struck the best bit of luck I've run across last night," he whispered. "Eat up, and come along with me."

A few moments later the two friends were walking up the village street. Halting before the last house at the end of the unpicturesque row of buildings, David gave three staccato knocks on the front door. It was opened presently by an elderly woman.

"Old man in?" demanded David.

With a dour nod she stepped aside, and the two men entered. Moving silently along the dark passage, she led them into the back room, and opening a door in the wall she beckoned them to follow. Descending a flight of steps, they found themselves in a low cellar. The light of a candle revealed half a dozen men sitting around a table upon which were glasses and a large stone jar. In the far corner stood a brick furnace with a large boiler above, connected by a long metal tube to a small iron cistern. A little wizened man was bending over a barrel close by.

"Why, it's an illicit still!" cried the astonished Hodson.

"Whist, mon," muttered the proprietor angrily. "D'ye no ken that walls have ears?"

"You need have no fear of him, Macdonald," interposed David, taking a seat at the table. "I wouldn't have brought him if he weren't a true man."

"Wull, tak' care you no slippit another word aboot any illicit still," grumbled the old Scotsman, glowering at Hodson. "If you be wanting to talk about a still, just repeat to yersel' that a still tongue maks a wise head."

"Taste a drop, Hodson," said David, pouring some of the contents of the jar into a glass and filling it up with water. "What d'you make of that, eh?"

"Whisky!" said Hodson, smacking his lips. "I'd almost forgotten the taste of it."

"Aye," continued David, helping himself. "It's a bit raw, but old Macdonald here can brew it as well as any man in England."

Half an hour later the two friends were walking down the street once more, each with a flask in his breast pocket.

"I only lit on the place last night," exclaimed David. "But there are hundreds of them, I hear, all over the country."

"But what inducement has a man to run them?" demanded Hodson. "Folks have no money now to pay for the stuff, and it'd be senseless to take the price in coupons."

"They're mostly syndicates, man," explained David, smacking his lips. "Sort of co-operative societies for mutual benefit. . . . They let you and me in 'cos they'll look to us to let 'em have an extra ration of coal now and then. . . . The other chaps you saw provide the barley. . . . But all the same yon old Macdonald barters lots of the stuff for such things as watches and jewelry, which he can get sold for him in foreign lands. . . . Aye, and there's a lot of smuggling abroad goes on. . . . If there's no money here, a chap can still put by a store in places like Germany and America."

V

A MONTH or two later, at the beginning of the New Year, Cohen was sitting at dinner amidst a small party of miners beside the face of coal in the deepest workings of a pit in south-east Lancashire. When Mrs. Rhyle had come into power a year and a half previously, she had guessed at once with feminine intuition that he was responsible for the attempt on the life of the President, and, having a devoted adherent as chief secretary of the National Work Bureau, it had been easy for her to wreak her vengeance upon the culprit by getting him deported to the north of England. Since then the combative Jew had laboured as a common miner, learning from actual experience that Socialism implied the absolute subordination of the individual to the State.

But the little man was tough and wiry, and his health had been improved by the hard work. He was glad of the opportunity of coming into touch with the miners, foreseeing that such a powerful body of men might prove most valuable supporters if he could convert them to his principles. So he had striven incessantly to make proselytes, losing no opportunity of sowing the seeds of suspicion and discontent. The despotic methods of the Government had made his task an easy one.

"Among the Jews," he was never tired of reiterating, "women have to keep in their proper sphere, but they're top dogs everywhere amongst Englishmen."

"Bitches, mon," corrected a burly miner, as Cohen repeated the oft-repeated text on this particular morning, "spiteful, snarling bitches."

"Yes, spite's a natural feminine instinct," Cohen replied, with a growl of anger. "It's a woman's revenge that has brought me down here."

"Well, and what's wrong wi' t' job, lad?" demanded another miner, resenting the implied reflection upon an

occupation of which, strange though it might appear, he was actually fond. "Thee ought to be proud thou ast getten among sich gradely mates."

Cohen glanced wearily along the black and narrow gallery that slanted steeply upwards, supported on either side by a forest of stout props, until it vanished into darkness beyond a distant light, where the passage was blocked by a canvas screen hung across to check the draught. Then his eyes wandered back to the coal face in front of him that glittered like silver in the dim glow of the miners' lamps. And he sighed as he reflected how difficult it was to incite these men to revolt.

"I'm proud to work in a coal-mine," he cried. "I'm heart and soul for Trade Unionism . . . as I've told you a thousand times, I'm sick and weary of the tyranny of slave-drivers."

"It's petticoat government," growled the misogynist miner. "There's never ony more peace for a mon if a woman gets the upper hond of him."

"She's bound to rule unless you keep her under," answered Cohen. "It's a question of numbers."

"Gammon!" retorted the other; "when all's said and done it depends on brute strength."

"For my part, I'm sick to death of sermonising," said the second miner. "First, we were told by Old Noll that we were to go slow and live a day at a time and we'd reach the millennium. . . . Next, a pack o' women scriked out that we'd jump straight into an earthly paradise if we'd be content to let 'em sweat us. . . . Now, you come along and talk to us about Trade Unionism. . . . I tell you, lad, it were kilt long ago when it meddled itself up wi' politics."

"I hate politics as much as any of you," exclaimed Cohen, combing his grimy beard. "I stand for full freedom for the individual. . . . I stand for Anarchy!"

"What the hangment's that?" said a voice in the darkness.

"I'd make the social organisation an industrial one, absolutely," replied Cohen excitedly, waving his arms.

"I'd let every trade manage its own affairs without let or hindrance. . . . The miners for the miners and the engineers for the engineers. . . . The whole body of producers should be the sole power in the State, with Soviets to do their bidding. . . . To hell with all other classes."

"It 'd be the same thing in the end as the Communes," objected the reactionary miner. "It 'd nobbut be another form of slave-driving. . . . More gormless Gov'ment officials for us chaps to keep."

"Not at all," retorted Cohen. "Communes mean State tyranny. . . . Anarchy would mean the free co-operation of all the workers. . . . There's all the difference in the world."

"Well, give me the good old days," replied the miner pensively. "I took whome five pun every week for forty hours' wark, and the three childer brought in another couple o' quid. . . An' my missus more nor kept hoosel' wi' a bit of charing. . . . I've not bettered mysen, I reckon."

"We get more food and clothes," said another.

"Aye, doled out to you as if you were an owd horse in a stable. . . . I see no sense in these blasted ration-tickets. . . . I'm fain to pick and choose for mysen. . . . It's just as if the war were going on still."

"And what about drink? How can there be liberty if a chap cannot have a pint when he pleases?"

The burly miner shuffled to his feet and taking up his lamp and his pick he scowled down upon his grumbling mates.

"I don't hold with Cohen and I don't hold with Old Noll," he growled. "But one thing I do know . . . there'll be no peace and quiet for ony chap till them scowbanking women gets thrut out . . . and I'll back ony mon as 'll tak' on t' job."

Cohen stumbled along the dark galleries when the day's work was over, feeling more exhilarated than he had done for many months. The little specks of light from the miners' lamps that flickered to and fro in front of him

along the black tunnel seemed to inspire him with confidence. One by one he was winning these men over to his side. Each gruff salute as a grimy figure slouched past filled him with joy. A train of waggons thundered along in an adjacent roadway. A shot fired in some distant workings reverberated with a dull echo through the pit. It was worth all the toil and hardship in this dismal environment to achieve what he was accomplishing. At the foot of the shaft he halted, waiting for the descending cage, a sinister figure in the glare of the furnace, which lighted up his fierce, hooked features, smeared with sweat and coal-dust, and glittered in his revengeful black eyes. More than ever was he resolved that the cause, which he had so dearly at heart, should triumph completely, or that he would lay down his life for it.

"I'll win yet," he muttered to himself, "and God help them all when I beat them."

As he stepped out on to the pit bank a tall young man, with white clear-cut features and thin cruel lips, met him with outstretched hand.

"Larcey!" he cried eagerly. "How long have you been in these parts?"

"Six months—working in a bleach-works. . . . They've marked me down the same as they marked you."

He took the Jew by the arm and led him away towards the high road through the gathering gloom. It was a bright and frosty evening.

"I'm well on the road to victory, Larcey. . . . They're all simmering with rebellion. . . . They see that men are doing most of the work, while women have all the power. . . . That's going to be our winning battle-cry."

Larcey looked down upon the frail, coal-begrimed little figure with flaming eyes.

"You're a hero, man," he cried, laying his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder. "To think of all you have suffered for the cause."

"It has done me good, boy. . . . But why didn't you write to me?"

"I could never trace you till last week or I should have

been here before. . . . I should ne'er have trusted the Post Office in any case. . . . Like enough they open all our letters."

"And how are things prospering with you?"

"Fine. . . . There's anger and discontent everywhere. . . . It's bound to come to an outburst afore long."

Cohen gripped his companion's arm.

"Listen, Larcey. . . . The country's on the verge of revolution. . . . They're all sick of the women and their drill-sergeant ways. . . . There's only one thing that can beat us—armed force."

"The National Service? . . . But they're workers, or will be, too. . . . I hope for more than half of them on our side."

"But we'll be up against the other half, plus their officers . . . and they'll have rifles!"

"Most of them are stowed away in the National Armoury."

Cohen's grasp on his friend's arm tightened, and his voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"Yes, in the old County Council building. . . . That's what I was going to tell you. . . . We must destroy those guns, lad, before the enemy can get them."

"Why not take them for ourselves?"

"Because we shan't be able to gather enough men together in time. . . . No, it'll be enough to destroy them. . . . Then it'll be our picks and scythes against theirs, and we shall beat them in numbers."

"But they'll turn out new guns from the Arsenal and Armstrong's."

"It'll be too late. . . . I've thought it all out, Larcey, and when the revolution comes I must have a few resolute men who'll set a light to the Armoury. . . . If that can be done there's nothing will stop our victory. . . . Police and unarmed soldiers cannot stand against a determined people. . . . You'll not fail me, eh?"

"I'm always ready when you need me," replied Larcey eagerly, his breath smoking in the keen night air. "When's the time to be?"

"I don't want to move for six months," said Cohen, with a fierce chuckle. "It's best policy to give those women all the rope they'll take. . . . It'll make a surer job of it at the finish."

"There's little doubt of the result," answered Larcey, with an oath.

"Most of my friends are confident," said Cohen reflectively. "We've been organising this thing for eighteen months. . . . By God, the day will come when I shall be able to hang that woman as high as Haman."

"It's what she'll do with us if she beats us," muttered Larcey. "She has the heart of a wolf for all her simpering smiles."

VI

One day toward the end of January, Mabel, the little Manchester shop-girl, was in trouble with the authorities again. Some stringent regulations had been issued recently by the Lancashire Commune—which, like all of them, was largely composed of women—with reference to the costumes that were to be worn by all the employees during business hours. Because the girl had happened to infringe some of these rules Betty had been ordered to bring her to the manageress's office during the luncheon-hour so that she might be reprimanded.

"I scarcely know how to begin," cried the manageress, when the pair stood before her. "Your dress, girl, is a disgrace."

"You see the regulations are so new," interposed Betty, anxious to exonerate the culprit; "she'll get to understand them in time."

"Pray don't try to make any excuses for her, Mrs. Thring," retorted the manageress, glaring upon the shrinking Mabel. "The rules are as plain as a pike-staff. . . . Look at that bow tie she's wearing. . . . It's silk."

"It's a bit of stuff I've had by me for a long time," faltered Mabel. "I didn't think there was no harm in it."

The manageress adjusted her spectacles upon her hooked nose with a gesture of impatience.

"You know very well that you must wear a cotton bow," she said, with a black frown. "Do you imagine the Government can afford to keep you all in silk?"

"Of course, Mabel, you can wear anything you like out of work-hours," added the sympathetic Betty, "as long as it comes within your dress ration."

"Which is on a most generous scale," snapped the manageress. "Everyone is allowed to use their coupons for clothes, amusements, travel, et cetera et cetera, just as they prefer. . . . But if they are over-lavish in one thing they must go short in another. . . . Now this girl, here," and she pointed an incriminating finger at Mabel, "would put it all on her back."

"Theatres are so stale now," pouted Mabel, "and I'm a home-bird, not a gadabout. . . . Since they give us free dancing there aren't much you can use your ration-tickets for except clothes. . . . And you're like to be decently dressed when you go to the National ball-rooms."

"We're wandering from the point," answered the manageress sternly. "Of course I can't prevent your extravagances in your playtime, though no doubt in time I shall have that power. . . . But I can see that you obey the rules during working-hours. . . . Now just look at her dress, Mrs. Thring. . . . Do you call that keeping within the regulations?"

Betty glanced at the skirt that the girl was wearing with the approval of a connoisseur.

"It's very well cut," she replied mutinously, with the glint of mischief in her eye.

"My dear Mrs. Thring! . . . It's an outrage. . . . You know as well as I do that the girls must all wear the regulation skirt made by their Grade tailor. . . . I shall report her to the Dress Inspector."

"Me and my mother put it together ourselves," protested Mabel. "I didn't see no harm in it. . . . I got the material from my Grade shop, and if we did use a bit more than we should I more than made it up to the State by making it myself instead of having it done for me."

"Well, except that it's better cut, it is exactly the same as the regulation pattern," said Betty emphatically.

The manageress shrugged her shoulders, still gazing truculently at Mabel through her spectacles.

"Stand a little farther back, girl."—Mabel did as she was told.—"Ah! just as I suspected. . . . Black silk stockings! . . . The regulations allow nothing but lisle-thread or worsted. . . . That's another thing that I shall have to tell the Inspector" . . . and she made an entry, relentlessly, in her notebook. "Silk comes from France, girl, and the State has to pay for it. . . . The Government can't allow you to flaunt about in such finery all day."

"Won't you overlook it just this once?" pleaded Betty. "I'm sure Mabel won't do it again."

The manageress, with her suspicious eyes riveted upon the over-bedecked Mabel, was deaf to the remonstrance.

"Turn up your skirt and let me see what you've got underneath," she exclaimed, with sudden impulse. "Let us know the worst about you."

The girl gave a little sob of dismay and clasped her fingers together in front of her spasmodically.

"Do you hear what I say?" continued the manageress inexorably.

"I can't for shame, missis," quavered the persecuted Mabel.

"Obey at once," cried the manageress, stamping her foot.

With quivering lips Mabel stooped down slowly and taking the hem of her skirt on both sides between her thumb and finger she drew it upwards reluctantly. Above the shapely silk stockings a filmy crêpe de chine petticoat came into view.

"I suspected as much," the manageress exclaimed, with a gasp of horror. "That's three complaints for the Inspector."

"So it's a crime to look pretty!" said Betty indignantly.

"I'm surprised at you, Mrs. Thring," answered the manageress. "Girls oughtn't to bother about their underclothes. . . . It's silly vanity."

"Nobody but me'd ever have seen it but for you," whimpered Mabel, lowering her skirt.

The manageress stamped imperiously.

"Lift up your hands, girl," she cried angrily. "I've not done with you yet. . . . I want to know what's under that petticoat."

The tears were glistening in Mabel's pathetic blue eyes and her cheeks blazed scarlet.

"Oh no, mum, please," she whimpered, hanging down her head.

"Turn up your petticoat," said the manageress relentlessly.

For a moment Mabel hesitated, standing sullenly before her persecutor in minuet attitude with her arms drooping at her sides and her raised skirt in her fingers. Then, with a little gesture of defiance, she lifted the veil of crêpe de chine above her knees, revealing a dainty garment of white batiste with two circles of flowing frills and pink ribbon draw-strings.

"I knew it!" thundered the indignant manageress. "The girl's decked out like a pre-war bride. . . . The extravagance of it!"

"Everybody wears them except old frumps," retorted Mabel, dropping her skirts with a toss of her head.

"Shop-girls don't," said the manageress. "At least not that kind. . . . You know the sort ordered by the regulations as well as I do."

"I call it a shame to meddle with one's undies," sobbed Mabel, breaking down at last, "and I made every stitch of them myself, so as they shouldn't have anything to grumble at. . . . The Government interfere

with you at every twist and turn. . . . I wish I was a German."

"Disobedient minx!" remarked the manageress to Betty, when the weeping shop-girl had left the room. "She did it out of pure wilfulness."

"Oh no," said Betty, shaking her head emphatically. "It's merely because she likes pretty things. . . . Aren't we women all the same?"

"Speak for yourself, Mrs. Thring," retorted the Lady Superior. "Rules are rules, and for my part I'm going to see them obeyed."

"Please let Mabel off this time," pleaded Betty. "I'm sure it'll be a lesson to her. . . . I find her one of my best girls."

"I will not let her off. . . . I intend to make an example of the hussy. . . . She has defied the law wilfully —from her skirt to her skin."

The lashes flickered over Betty's earnest brown eyes.

"Our poor girls don't seem to have much of a time nowadays."

The manageress's pale face hardened.

"There I disagree with you. . . . They have a better time than they ever had before. . . . Everything is done for them."

"That's exactly what I mean," persisted Betty, with a smile. "They'd be much happier if they were allowed to do more for themselves."

"They've no anxieties," continued the manageress, "and they have a superfluity of everything. . . . The rations are ample."

"Ungrateful children, aren't they?" said Betty cynically. "But you see it is a natural instinct with the young of every species to crave for independence."

VII

COMMUNISM seemed to have been developed to its farthest limits. The paternal, or rather the maternal, Government was supreme, and the individual was expected to be a good and obedient child. The theories of State Socialism could have accomplished nothing more. Yet the people were neither happy nor content.

The abolition of money, which was a necessary and logical conclusion if equality was to be preserved, had deprived human nature of one of its most favourite pursuits. The instinct to strive and to hoard, which was as old as Adam, was supposed to have been eradicated as completely as though the organism which occasioned it had been extirpated by the surgeon's knife. The result was much the same as if all the bones in the world had been taken away so that the dogs could not hide them. It seemed to the dogs as if a vital part of their existence suddenly had disappeared. But the animal could not forget that it was a dog, and, impelled by its nose, was incessantly reverting back to type. Mankind remembered with regret that the chief joy of their lives had been money-making.

It was in vain that the authorities employed persistent propaganda to show that their system of rationing apportioned a far larger share of the good things of life to the great majority than they ever had enjoyed before. It was a lamentable fact that it was no satisfaction to the individual to know that all his fellow-men were just as well off as himself. The average person would have been far more exhilarated had he been aware that he had gained a few coupons more than his fellows owing to his superior merit. Altruism had not become more prevalent because all were supposed to share alike.

The ration-tickets were neither as convenient nor as soul-satisfying as bank-notes or cash. Even the most

imaginative could not resist the suspicion that he had been swindled when he received a paper book on pay days instead of gold and silver coin. And they were far less comprehensible. It was always difficult to calculate how to fit them in with personal requirements. Inveterate play-goers, who had used up too many coupons at the box office, often found that they had not enough left for their annual holiday at the seaside; while the improvident week-ender, having utilised all his tickets in travel, frequently had to go short of clothes. Still, it was deemed inexpedient to apportion them more closely to their particular values, for the law of Equivalent Compensation demanded that he who disliked the theatre should have more to spend upon railway journeys, or that the home-lover, who had no taste for travelling, should be free to make up the difference in dress. There were other anomalies also. Since it was impossible for the tickets to be non-transferable without appointing a new staff of officials to check them on collection, they were the subject of infinite barter and exchange. Although most games of chance were robbed of half their fascination and pitch and toss was made a physical impossibility, thousands of coupons were lost and won at play every night. Moreover, the ration-tickets of the miserly were invariably out of date before their owners could make up their minds to part with them. As a method of making everyone share and share alike they failed to realise expectations.

Still, the rule of women had speeded up the wheels of industry everywhere. Towards the end of January Cyril and Hothersall paid a visit to the foundry near Bolton where the latter had received a hostile reception from the workmen when he had called there last, and found the whole place as busy as a bee-hive. All signs of ca' canny had vanished completely.

Accompanied by the manager, they entered the grim and spacious moulding-shop. Beyond an arched doorway in the centre of the far wall the glare of a blast-furnace shone through the gloom. In the middle of the building

a glowing bucket, supported by a tall crane, was emptying a stream of molten iron into a ring of moulds beneath. Men were hurrying to and fro in couples, carrying a smaller ladle of liquid metal between them by long projecting handles, and pouring it into the patterns prepared to receive it. Others, on their knees in the soft black sand, were building up the various flasks in which the moulds were contained. There was not an idle man to be seen anywhere.

Jesse and Chris, the erstwhile shirkers, were seated on the floor side by side ramming down foundry sand into their respective boxes, strenuous and perspiring.

"I've ne'er touched a card sin' them coupons come in," Chris observed dolefully. "They've took all the flutterment out of a game."

"I play every neet whelly," replied Jesse, with a chuckle, "and I've fair skinned yon 'Enry 'Eppenstall. I won a mort o' coupons from him the last few weeks."

"What are you going to do wi' 'em?"

"Wull, I were like to spend 'em quick sin' they were nobbut available for a month, and I were freetened, too, they'd make 'em non-transferable. . . . So I laid 'em out in clothes. . . . Good Lorjus days, I've three brand-new suits besides the three I had by me. . . . There'll be no call for me to put my nose inside a tailor's shop for ten years whelly."

"And what'll 'Enry do?"

"There'll be no Blackpool or the-a-ters for 'Enry till the back-end if he wants to have a pair o' britches to his tail. . . . But I'm on velvet, mon. . . . I'll have so many spare tickets I con take mysen off to the seaside every Saturday and go to a music-hall all the neets o' the week."

Chris grunted contemptuously.

"When all's said and done, it's not the same as winning honest brass from a chap. . . . I get no enj'yment oather out of bowls nor cards nowadays."

"You owd grumble-belly," Jesse retorted. "Why connot you take things as you find 'em? . . . It's all the same at the finish as lung as you win."

"I've heard it said as them women are going to bring ı a law to forbid you playing a game for owt but love," ıid Chris. "They say as how onybody oughtn't to take nything from onybody."

"They'll bring in a law to put us all into petticoats fore they've done," growled Jesse.

"It's about the only way to keep all folks equal," eplied Chris, with a sneer. "But they're more like to tick all the women into britches."

At that moment, Hothersall, who had recognised his wo acquaintances in the distance, detached himself from Cyril and the manager, and strolled up to the moulders vith his hands in his pockets.

"Hello, Tom," cried Jesse unceremoniously, glancing ıp from his task. "I heerd tell of that cushy job thou st getten from the Government."

"I wark harder nor thee, Jesse," answered Hothersall, though you have to stir your stumps a bit faster than ou used to do."

"This country's worse nor Germany ever was," growled Chris. "I'd swop them women for the Kaiser and velcome."

"Why, the State looks after you just as if you were a ucking child," said Hothersall cynically.

"That's just it," replied Jesse. "But I happen to be a grown mon."

"You get plenty to eat and drink, don't you?"

Jesse raised a pair of clenched fists above his grimy ace wrathfully.

"Drink! . . . Don't talk to me about drink, Tom, or shall be killing summat."

"Well, at all events, we've got everything now on an quality," said Hothersall.

"Nawe, I'll be hanged if we have, Tom," exclaimed Chris. "As long as there's officials like you and that here manager of ours there's no sich thing as equality."

Perceiving that his companions were leaving the building, Hothersall followed them through a swing door, and found himself in the clangorous erecting-shop, where the steel

plates of the steam boilers were being welded together by the electric-riveting machine, invented by the ingenious manager. He was much interested to find that the efficiency of the old foundry had improved so greatly, and as soon as they had passed into a less noisy department amidst long rows of whirling lathes he turned eagerly towards his guide.

"Your production seems to have increased since I was here last," he observed, with a glance of inquiry.

"It's no more than it was before the war," replied the manager, "though I should say everybody's working at full stretch. . . . You see, we're handicapped at every turn in development. . . . In the old days I'd only the old governor to consult if I wanted any improvement. . . . But now"—he shrugged his shoulders petulantly—"to get the Commune Committee to agree to anything is like kicking your way through a stone wall."

"Still, the trade of the nation is prosperous enough to provide an abundance for everybody," returned Hothersall.

"At present," said the manager grimly, "but d'you think we can hold our own for long? . . . There's a dearth of new ideas everywhere. . . . All the fresh inventions come from abroad . . . and we're the last to get them, consequently."

"Ah, but think how free and equal we all are, my friend," replied Cyril sarcastically.

The manager threw back his head angrily. He was a robust, thick-set man in the prime of life, with strong, rugged features. He had been a great captain of industry, one of those who had risen to the top of the tree by his own exertions from the lowliest starting-point.

"What incentive is there for inventors?" he exclaimed scornfully. "The Government are afraid of encouraging any man to rise above the ruck. . . . And if they do, that man is hated and despised by the working-classes. . . . It was bound to be so when we began to preach that one man was as good as another. . . . It's a stupid, mischievous lie."

"But they hope to reduce everybody to one common level," said Cyril mischievously.

"Well, I've had enough of it," continued the manager. "I'm going to America."

"They'll do their best to stop you, lad," said Hothersall. "They don't like losing chaps like you."

"Then I shall have to fly," replied the manager. "I mean to get away somehow. . . . They keep on docking my salary to curry favour with the people. . . . There'll be nothing left of it in a bit."

"And does that gratify the people?" inquired Cyril, with a cynical smile.

"Not it. . . . A man's never satisfied now if one man gets more pay than another unless that man's himself."

"What do you think is going to be the end of it all?" demanded Cyril abruptly.

"It'll come to a trial of strength between Cohen and the women," responded the manager gloomily. "If Mrs. Rhyle comes out on top, we shall have more Prussianism; and if the Jew gets into power, we shall have a dose of the Bolsheviks. . . . It's a dreary prospect either way."

"And what price Anymoon?" said Hothersall, who had faith still in his old leader.

"Anymoon's a back number," answered the manager, snapping his fingers.

"I'm not so sure," said Cyril thoughtfully. "He has a knack of bobbing up again when it looks as if they'd sunk him."

"Well, poor old England's in for trouble anyhow," observed the manager, "and thank goodness I shall be out of it all. . . . This country's no place for fellows like me. You can't turn round without knocking up against some blooming Government official."

VIII

On the same afternoon both Mrs. Rhyle and Grace Dalrymple, unknown to one another, were standing in different parts of the deck of a great liner in the docks at Southampton. The latter had come to say good-bye to a friend; the former was present so that she could observe the working of one of the great national experiments, arising from the law of Equivalent Compensation.

In the opinion of the philanthropist, it had not been enough to put all men and women on the same level in their food and clothes and amusements and habitations. In order to redress the injustices of nature, it was necessary also to indemnify, as far as it lay in human power, those unfortunate individuals who did not enjoy the essential boon of health. It was unfair that the sick, who lived a life of pain and distress, should have no larger share of creature comforts than the robust, to whom the mere fact of existence was a pleasure. It was still more anomalous that the invalid should be compelled to endure surroundings which were inimical to his malady. The law of Equivalent Compensation demanded that there should be some recompense for the sufferings which physical misfortunes had imposed upon so many, and that every one of these poor creatures should be able to live in the environment best suited to his complaint. Until science and hygiene had succeeded in stamping out disease, these humanitarian considerations must be observed by a community that was based upon the equal rights of man.

So sanatoria had been established at national expense in some of the most genial climes of the world, such as the west coast of Africa, the Canary Islands, and the hinterland of the Cape, and during the winter months the invalids of Great Britain were deported to these places in specially-equipped liners. The banishment was compulsory, for the State, of course, could not pay any

consideration to the wishes of the individual. In its wisdom it did what was best in the interests of all. Since everyone was "on the panel," the most drastic hygienic regulations were enforced.

Grace was bidding farewell to an old schoolfellow, the daughter of a cavalry officer, a poor, wan girl, obviously in the last stages of consumption. They were standing in a sheltered part of the deck, looking across the sparkling waters of the vast dock, screened by the engine-house wall from the keen north-east wind.

"I said good-bye to mother at home," said the invalid sadly. "Parting always seems so much worse on board ship."

"Yes, one realises the sorrow more when the boat is gliding away," answered Grace sympathetically.

"It is so cruel that she cannot come with me," continued the girl, with a sigh. "I don't think we shall ever see each other again."

"You mustn't say that," replied Grace quickly. "You will get quite strong again in South Africa."

The girl shook her head with a mournful smile.

"Of course, I realise that the Government couldn't send a relation with every invalid. But it does seem hard lines. . . . In the old days, when I was first ill, mother always used to come with me to Luxor or Madeira. . . . We managed to go abroad every winter, though we had only a thousand a year. . . . They might have spared us that little bit."

There was a hard glitter in Grace's grey eyes.

"They thought that we should all be happier if we divided everything up."

In the deserted library on the promenade deck Mrs. Rhyle was seated in earnest colloquy with the alert little doctor who was in charge of the expedition.

"We shall drop a couple of hundred of the weak chests at Mogador and the Canaries," he was telling her. "The phthisical cases are all going on to the Cape. . . . The high Karroo is the only place for them."

"Poor souls!" sighed Mrs. Rhyle. "I am so happy to think that we can make their lot a little brighter."

"In many cases we do nothing of the sort," said the doctor, pursing his clean-shaven lips decisively.

"But surely our sanatoriums are all that money can provide! . . . And they have endless amusements."

"Oh, that's all right. . . . But environment is everything to the invalid. . . . You must remember that you are tearing these people from the bosoms of their families."

Mrs. Rhyle smiled incredulously.

"Family life is ancient history, or very nearly so."

"My dear madam, I beg to differ. . . . Human nature still remains the same."

A look of infinite charity stole over her handsome face.

"What is your remedy, doctor?" she said, with her sweetest smile.

"If you wish to interpret this law of Equivalent Compensation logically, every invalid should be accompanied by a companion of his or her own choosing. . . . You wish to recompense these poor creatures, and if possible to cure them. . . . Well, happiness is a great healer."

The smile on her face became a sad one, and she sat in silence for a few moments, pondering.

"It might be possible," she said at length, "though the expense would be enormous. . . . Do you know, doctor, I sometimes wonder whether after all it would not be more humane to put the chronic invalid out of his misery at once."

The little doctor gave a low whistle.

"That's a tall order," he replied.

"It's a question of expediency, like most things in life," she answered, with a mournful sigh. "We have left the age of religious superstition far behind, and Hegira is our sole deity. . . . Besides, it would only be necessary during the present generation of mankind."

"I don't think your suggestion would be popular," said the doctor drily.

"Yes, of course," she replied sadly. "Reforms that benefit a nation most are always unwelcome at the onset. . . . I am fully aware that the abolition of marriage is unpopular . . . at any rate with the women."

"Most of them like a man all to themselves," he retorted, with a mischievous laugh. "They prefer the 'to have and to hold' system."

"And yet the introduction of State licences will prove an incalculable benefit to the human race."

"Quite right, my dear madam; but you might have taken all these precautions and still have allowed a woman to deposit the man in her creel. . . . Marriage lines meant such a lot to her even if they were cancelled in six months by the divorce court."

"I admit that a temporary union does not give her equal satisfaction, but after all the chief consideration is the offspring. . . . In the future, when we have attained our ideal and the whole race is purged of disease, perhaps there will be no necessity to have breeding licences any longer."

Presently, while Mrs. Rhyle was walking along the deck, a stalwart lady-doctor, with closely-cropped hair and a massive face, rushed up to her excitedly.

"The very person I want to talk to," she babbled. "You must restore the old marriage laws immediately. . . . With State licences and elastic divorce this will make for the most rational union of the sexes."

A look of surprise passed over Mrs. Rhyle's features.

"But why do you attach so much importance to the ceremony?" she demanded. "You are the last person I should have expected to be reactionary."

"Ceremony plays a most essential part in human affairs," replied the other volubly. "Why do we brush our hair and clean our boots? . . . Out of self-respect. . . . The marriage ceremony added to woman's self-respect. . . . Nothing else can take its place."

"A man's a man for all that," said Mrs. Rhyle, with a gentle smile.

"That's just it. . . . One is bound to mate with him,

if one's a scientist, like myself, for the sake of the practical experience. . . . If you set up as an expert on sexual matters, you must have experienced the real thing. In the old days a woman could easily wangle a man into marriage, separate as soon as convenient, and then, in nine cases out of ten, since he's an incontinent animal, obtain a divorce and a good advertisement at the same time. . . . But you've put an end to all this, you aggravating Mrs. Rhyle."

"My good woman, the doctor has been talking to you——"

"No, I've been talking to him. . . . Temporary unions give a great advantage to a man. . . . He can leave you when he likes and take on with someone else."

"So he always could."

"Yes, but under the old law he couldn't get his divorce as easily as we could, for the woman has so much more self-control. Now he can be as polygamous as he likes without loss of prestige."

"The chief consideration is the child," Mrs. Rhyle began sententiously.

"Take care of the women and the children will take care of themselves," retorted the other. "If you have any regard for the greatest happiness of the greatest number, you need have no concern for the men. . . . They're in a hopeless minority."

"But your husband died early."

The lady-doctor smiled at the reminiscence.

"I hope you don't suggest that I killed him. . . . Yes, I've got my hall-mark all right, but I'm thinking of the woman of the future. . . . It's most unfair that you have taken away her greatest advantage over the men."

A look of infinite tenderness stole into Mrs. Rhyle's gentle eyes.

"My good doctor, you seem to have no conception of my aspirations. . . . I look forward to a world in which woman shall be the absolute ruler—as, being the chief propagator of the species, she ought to be—and

where man shall be of no more account than the drone in the bee-hive. . . . But, of course, I am not such a fool as to advertise my opinions prematurely."

. . . . . .

The siren to warn visitors to leave the ship had sounded for the last time. The gangways were pulled ashore, and the loops of the hawsers fell with a sudden splash into the water. A stream of foam swept from the stern of the great vessel as it moved slowly from the moorings. Over the rails on both the main and the promenade decks a white-faced crowd leant forward wistfully, waving handkerchiefs and shouting feeble farewells to their friends on shore. The people on the dock-side raised a tremulous cheer in response. The strains of a concertina, played by some cheery soul, were mingled with the stifled sobbing of women.

"I shall never see him again," wailed an old lady in mourning, burying her face in her hands

"I'm coming back in the summer, mother," a young man, with a face like death, called shrilly from the liner.

"How lucky they are to escape all the fogs and snow," remarked a rosy-cheeked young woman, who was merely seeing an asthmatical brother off to Teneriffe.

"It's transportation for life for many of them," muttered a burly man, who had just bidden adieu to a consumptive sister.

The ship had swung around in the centre of the dock and was pausing for its plunge into the channel towards the open sea. Its graceful lines were silhouetted against a crimson patch in the western sky. The shadows of the winter evening were creeping over the face of the waters. Except for the last faint gleam of the setting sun everything appeared grey and bleak and steel-like in the bitter north-east wind.

Grace was gazing mournfully at the long black hull as it faded away into the darkness. The keen breeze had heightened the colour in her cheeks, and there was a glint of gold in her hair as the western glow fell upon it.

"The law of Equivalent Compensation!" she mur-

mured to herself. "Its right interpretation is a mighty problem. . . . What I have seen this afternoon is scarcely worth while."

Some distance farther down the dock-side the perplexed Mrs. Rhyle was watching the outgoing liner with tearful eyes.

"I am not sure that the lethal chamber would not be best for most of those poor souls," she was thinking with an aching heart.

. . . . . .

On the same afternoon a frail little woman was walking through one of the National cemeteries to visit her son's grave. Its locality was familiar to her since she came here once a week, otherwise she might well have had a difficulty in finding it, for the interminable rows of tiny tombstones were all alike, ranged in close ranks like a battalion on parade. Every one stood twelve inches high by six inches in width, the State having decreed that there should be "no distinctions," and as cremation was now obligatory not much space was required for each monument. No wife or mother was allowed to erect the smallest memorial to her loved one. The new, strange, jealous god, called Equality, kept watch and ward over the necropolis and the strictest uniformity was observed.

For this reason the little woman had always taken care that her boy's tomb should be strewn with fresh flowers each week and she had brought some beautiful ones this afternoon—great sprays of lilies and white chrysanthemums—which had cost her many coupons, winter flowers being an expensive luxury in these days. She was kneeling beside the headstone in the bitter east wind, arranging the blooms with trembling fingers, when a peevish contralto voice fell upon her ear. Looking up she saw that a stalwart policewoman was standing beside her.

"Haven't you seen the new order?"

"What order, mum?" inquired the poor mother.

The policewoman gave a scornful laugh. She was an imposing figure in her frock coat and loose trousers, but her physical development was scarcely suitable for active

service in places such as Sidney Street or the slums of Ancoats.

"You know right enough," she retorted, expanding her ample chest. "Flowers is forbidden now. They're against the law."

"But I've brought them for my poor boy."

"Then you can take them away again. What do I care about your poor boy? I'm here to see that there's equality. You just hook it."

And the officer resumed her beat with as man-like a stride as possible.

IX

THERE was discord between Mr. and Mrs. Anymoon for the first time during their long married life. She was sitting stiffly in an arm-chair, knitting silently, with an immobile face and her chin elevated slightly. He was pacing the floor with angry strides, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his grey trousers. Presently he paused, gazing out of one of the windows upon the snow-mantled park with a dark frown.

"How on earth have you managed it?" he demanded, sweeping his hand impatiently over his smooth forehead.

Her aquiline nose was raised half an inch.

"I like that!" she answered, with a curl of her red lips.

They were in the library where the bomb explosion had taken place eighteen months previously, waiting for tea to be brought in. Mrs. Anymoon had just communicated to him a most amazing piece of intelligence.

"It's perfectly absurd," he exclaimed, resuming his tempestuous perambulation, "at your age."

"Why blame me?" she asked calmly.

His defiant blue eyes rested upon her resentfully, and there was an expression of stern reproach on his coarse, clean-shaven lips.

"It's most careless——" he began.

"It's as much your fault as mine," she interrupted.

He was silent for a moment. Then he turned upon her abruptly.

"Are you quite sure?"

She inclined her head with dignity.

"If I hadn't been, I shouldn't have told you."

His hand wandered from his small brown side-whiskers to the wart upon his cheek.

"When is it to be?" he asked, with a sigh.

"August," she replied laconically.

"Heavens, what a month!" he muttered.

"I don't see that that makes any difference," she answered.

He folded his arms dismally across his broad chest and went on with his walk.

"It puts me in a most ridiculous position," he remarked, "and nothing kills like ridicule."

"Don't be absurd, my dear," she retorted. "What is there ridiculous about having a baby!"

He drew himself up with dignity.

"The law's the law, and it's the irony of fate that I, the President, should have broken it."

She smiled placidly.

"As usual, the law is an ass."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We can't help that. . . . There it is, and it has got to be obeyed. . . . The mother must not be more than forty and the father under fifty. . . . People have been imprisoned for transgressing."

Her smile broadened.

"Well, I don't think they'll imprison you and me."

"Perhaps not, but the absurdity of the thing may mean my downfall."

A hard glitter stole into her placid eyes.

"You're afraid of what Mrs. Rhyle will say, my dear."

"The devil take Mrs. Rhyle. . . . I'm thinking of the effect it will have upon the people."

"Oh, the people are all right," she answered, with

a little scornful toss of her rounded chin, "if the Government would not make fools of them."

"I'm not defending the law——"

"I should think not, indeed. . . . The great Lord Chatham was fifty-one when William Pitt was born. . . . Perhaps your son will have as fine an intellect as he had."

Anymoon paused abruptly. Then a smile illumined his face, and as he looked down upon her again a gentle light stole into his eyes. Walking across to her, he sat down on the arm of the chair, and bending over he kissed her tenderly.

"Whatever happens," he whispered, "we shall always have one another—you and I."

She raised a radiant face to his, smiling up at him.

"Then you don't mind?"

"No, dear, of course not," he replied fondly. "I am only anxious about you."

A little later, when the President had gone away to a committee meeting, Grace came in to see her friend.

"Are you glad?" she cried, when Mrs. Anymoon had whispered the news.

"Yes; I have always wanted a child."

Grace kissed her fondly.

"Then I am glad too."

"It has made me very happy," said Mrs. Anymoon.

Grace sat in silence for a moment, a gleam of white betwixt her parted lips, the glow of the fire-light glittering in her golden hair. There was a yearning look in her soft, hazel eyes.

"I envy you very much," she murmured.

Of late, Mrs. Rhyle had been much chastened and subdued. Ever since her great triumph a year and a half before, when the women had returned her to power in order to enforce discipline and efficiency, she had lost most of the elections. When a third of the Communes had retired six months previously, according to law, only three of her candidates had been re-chosen. At last she was beginning to realise that women as a general rule are not particularly anxious to be represented by legis-

lators of their own sex. The truth had begun to dawn upon her that they were no more unanimous than men in their political views, having likewise a hundred different idiosyncrasies.

The new members of the Communes were all of the masculine gender. Although elected ostensibly in opposition to the women candidates, only a minority of them were hostile to the presidency of Anymoon, and thus their presence actually strengthened his position, since it helped to make him more independent of Mrs. Rhyle. It was evident that if the electors remained of the same mind for another year that he would have a loyal majority of his own. Although there were rumours that Cohen had many supporters scattered throughout the country, their votes hitherto had not exercised any influence, and with their leader seconded in a coal-mine, the Government believed that the faction had ceased to be formidable.

In consequence of her declension, Mrs. Rhyle had become far more deferential and subservient to the President. She never took a step without consulting him; she never acted contrary to his wishes. She was clever enough to perceive that he had ceased merely to be a valuable asset because of his prestige, and that it appeared probable that she soon would be dependent upon his goodwill. Thus, when he led her into the Tapestry Room as soon as the committee meeting was over and told her his news, she received the information with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Oh, you happy young things!" she exclaimed, shaking a forefinger at him playfully. "It makes me feel as if we were all twenty-five."

From his fresh-coloured cheeks to his pink forehead Anymoon became a shade more rosy.

"It is a matter of astonishment to me," he stammered awkwardly. "I was never so surprised in my whole life. . . . This greatness has been thrust upon me absolutely."

"Surely it is Mrs. Anymoon who ought to say that,"

replied Mrs. Rhyle, an unwonted twinkle of mischief in her kind eyes.

The President winced, but he was relieved, nevertheless, that she regarded the matter so lightly.

"I am glad that you are not at all apprehensive."

A look of inquiry flickered over her handsome face.

"Ah, yes, poor Mrs. Anymoon—at her time of life. . . . I beg your pardon."

He coughed impatiently, for there was a suggestion of irony in her voice.

"I was thinking of public opinion. . . . I have been afraid that the event may be unpopular. . . . After all, we have broken the law."

Mrs. Rhyle shook her head.

"The President can do no wrong."

"We must not adopt those obsolete phrases, my dear lady," he answered, frowning.

She glanced at him with an expression of penitence.

"With regard to public opinion you may make your mind easy," she replied sweetly. "Everyone will be delighted at the prospect of having a little Anymoon. . . . It would be a national calamity if the race were to die out."

He scrutinised her kindly features earnestly, but though her silvery voice had the ring of sincerity, he could not make up his mind whether she was speaking cynically or in earnest.

X

Five months had passed away and August had come round again. It was nearly four and a half years since Anymoon had accomplished his Great Upheaval. Two years had elapsed since Mrs. Rhyle and her disciples, by reason of their victory at the polls, had entered into the coalition with the President. The annual election of a third of the Local Communes had taken place once more.

Although many of the women candidates had been defeated, their party still retained a small majority in most of the electoral colleges. On the National Council also Mrs. Rhyle possessed twelve devoted followers. The other ten, every one of them a man, were supporters of Anymoon. Amongst others, Crannock, Hothersall and Phillips had all regained their places. Thus, apparently, the Coalition Government were in as strong a position as ever.

It was a hot, windless night, and the National Council was assembled in solemn conclave in St. James's Palace. The faces of all were grave and full of care. In spite of its large majority the administration seemed on the verge of disaster. A great national crisis had arisen, and the whole country seemed as though it was about to be plunged into a bloody revolution. At intervals the bell of the telephone, which had been connected for several hours with the Intelligence Bureau, would ring out insistently, and some message of importance would come through. Kenneth Darell was the only official present. In view of the gravity of the situation the shorthand clerks had been excluded.

Anymoon sat in the President's chair, but to-night he seemed a very different Anymoon from the genial autocrat who was wont to preside over these assemblies. The most cursory glance revealed the fact that the great man was not himself. The dull glitter of fever shone in his sunken eyes, and his rugged features were haggard and inflamed. He moved restlessly in his seat, his gaze wandering dreamily about the room. Apparently, he was incapable of any sustained concentration of thought. From time to time his head would droop wearily towards his breast, while a sudden shiver often convulsed his stalwart frame. Now and then, some of the twelve women Councillors cast a pitying look upon him, mingled with apprehension. The fear that the President might fail them in this supreme crisis filled them with dismay.

For some days he had been feeling unwell, but with wonted tenacity he had struggled against his indisposi-

tion. Anxiety for his wife, who was nearing the time of her ordeal, had preyed upon his mind. It had been his wish that his child should come into the world in his own residence, but Mrs. Anymoon, refusing to accept any privileges that might possibly arouse the jealousy of other women, had insisted upon going to one of the National Maternity Homes.

"I will not have it said that the President's wife has special favouritism," she had told him. "It would do you a great deal of harm, my dear."

There were other considerations that made her objection a reasonable one. It was probable that her panel doctor, in whom she had great confidence, might not be able to attend her. According to the law, if she chanced to have need of him at a time when his eight hours' work for the day had been accomplished, he would not be able to officiate, and the deputy, who happened to be doing that particular "shift," would have to be called in. Although her own doctor, out of personal regard for her and in deference to her exalted position, would have been anxious and willing to attend her, a special dispensation would have been necessary for the purpose. Of this Mrs. Anymoon had declined to avail herself, and so, in spite of the objections of her husband, she had decided to bear her baby in the establishment in Northumberland Avenue. Three days had elapsed since she had left the Palace, and the President expected to receive, at any moment, the news that he had become a father. Indeed, he would have been with her now if he had not been obliged to attend the meeting of the Council.

There had been momentous happenings in the north of England. Inspired by the emissaries of Cohen, the miners, engineers and transport workers had declared a universal strike. Work of every kind was immediately brought to a standstill. Encouraged by their success, the rebels proceeded to mobilise a revolutionary army, which, although destitute of rifles, had only the unarmed conscripts of the National Service opposed to them. Owing to the parsimony and pacificism of the Government

there were not a hundred guns of any description north of the Trent.

The moment of the rebellion had been chosen with consummate craft. A few weeks previously the bulk of the fleet had departed for a cruise round the world. The Governments of Australasia and the United States had long desired a visit from the British Navy, and the National Council, partly out of vanity, in order to show what capable warships it still possessed, and partly from a desire to gratify two nations that were sprung from the same stock, had accepted the invitation with avidity. Moreover, their decision had been influenced by the manifest desire of the sailors themselves to undertake the voyage, and the League of Nations had made no objection.

There was not one of the Council now who did not regret bitterly their lamentable want of foresight. The last wireless message from the fleet had been sent from the Sandwich Islands, and many weeks must elapse before the swiftest ship could reach the shores of England. As they sat around the long, baize table, waiting expectantly for the messages that came to them over the telephone and discussing the situation with growing apprehension, every one of them realised that Cohen and his people had caught them napping.

Crannock, as massive and imperturbable as ever, was the first to make any reference to the fatal blunder.

"When it was suggested that the fleet should take this cruise," he observed, rising to his feet, "I was one of the few in this Council, Mr. President, who opposed the project. . . . I am curious to know whose was the ingenious mind which originated the idea."

Anymoon glanced up wearily.

"Is there any use in crying over spilt milk?" he answered. "I did not like the scheme myself, but I was in a minority."

"By gum, it seems to me that we ought to get to the bottom of this 'ere matter," exclaimed Hothersall truculently. "It favours treachery. . . . Them there women voted for it tooth and nail."

All eyes were turned to Mrs. Rhyle, who rose to answer the imputation instantaneously, regarding her challenger with a sweet, diffident smile.

"I expected recriminations," she replied in a clear, ringing voice. "But all the same I have no apology to offer. . . . The scheme was approved by the Council, with only three dissentients. . . . We wished to pay a compliment to Australia and America. . . . Admiral Rouse was heartily in favour of the voyage."

Admiral Rouse, recently appointed to command the fleet, was the erstwhile captain, to whose ship Thring had paid a memorable visit two years before.

The youthful Phillips, with the long hair and the poet's eyes, sprang quickly to his feet.

"It is a curious coincidence," he remarked quietly. "I wonder whether Admiral Rouse guessed what was coming."

Mrs. Rhyle, who had resumed her seat, nodded approvingly.

"Yes, indeed," said she; "he is known to be a thorough reactionary."

"Do you suggest that he is a traitor?" demanded Crannock cynically.

Anymoon raised a protesting hand.

"I think that I can satisfy the Council on this point," he observed. "We have cabled to Admiral Rouse to return immediately, and he has replied that he is coming."

"He's no traitor," cried Hothersall scornfully. "Though happen he'd be as pleased as me to see them women stew in their own juice for a bit."

"Really, Mr. Hothersall," protested Mrs. Rhyle, beaming upon the Lancashire deputy, "your language is a little too robust."

"I don't mince my words, missis," retorted Hothersall.

Kenneth Darell, who was seated beside Anymoon at the top of the table, rose to his feet a moment later.

"The President, who is not at all well, which we very much regret, has asked me to make a brief statement on

his behalf," he observed in a calm, measured voice. "The situation, although serious, is not irretrievable. . . . The National Service has been mobilised and seventy-five per cent at least have responded loyally to the call. . . . As soon as rifles can be conveyed to the troops we believe that the insurgents will disperse peaceably to their homes."

"They never ought to have had their arms taken away from them," interrupted Hothersall. "What's the good of pop-gun soldiers!"

"I think we adopted the right principle," remarked Phillips dreamily. "It would have been a permanent menace to the liberties of the Commonwealth if we had allowed one portion of the community to carry arms."

"Be that as it may," resumed Darell, "the rifles at present are in the National Armoury. . . . As you all know, they could not be removed without an order in Council. . . . You have now given that order, and we can only await developments. . . . A hundred thousand will be distributed before the morning."

"I suppose you've got a guard at the Armoury?" said Hothersall.

Darell nodded.

"The same as we have always had at the Bank," he answered. "But, of course, they will have been reinforced now by a regiment of the National Guards."

The telephone bell began to tinkle again. Mrs. Rhyle, who was sitting at the foot of the table, glided swiftly to the instrument. A moment later, the receiver had fallen from her hands and she confronted her colleagues with a look of dismay.

"The Armoury is on fire!" she faltered.

Involuntarily the eyes of all turned to the long, open windows. Far away in the distance, beyond the tall towers of Westminster, a deep red glow was spreading in the southern sky.

. . . . . .

An hour after sunset that evening a small steam-tug was drawing a couple of large barges up the river above the Charing Cross railway bridge. Since it was almost

high tide the small flotilla had no difficulty in running alongside the terrace that bordered part of the front of the old London County Council buildings. Half a dozen sturdy figures sprang ashore with ropes in their hands, and in a few moments they had moored the boats firmly to the parapet. The massive façade of the National Armoury rose steeply above their heads, gleaming white and ghost-like in the darkness. Below, the swift waters lapped and gurgled against the stones.

"This way, lads," whispered a deep voice, and Larcey led his followers to one of the square, ground-floor windows.

There was a faint ring of breaking glass, and one by one the men followed each other through the window.

"Tread quietly," muttered Larcey, as the invaders stood together within the building. "There are only eight guards, including the lieutenant. . . . It'll be an easy job to dope the lot of 'em in turn."

And as he spoke he drew a bottle from his pocket and poured a little of its contents on to a handkerchief.

Stealing forward silently without their shoes they came upon the first sentry at the foot of a flight of stairs. He was in their clutches before he was aware of their presence, and as the anæsthetic was pressed to his face he dropped limply to the floor. A quarter of an hour later every one of the guards had been overpowered in the same manner. The Armoury was at the mercy of the invaders.

More figures sprang on to the terrace from the boats, bearing light and bulky sacks in their arms, sacks stuffed with straw or wool, passing them quickly through the windows of the building to their companions inside. The holds of the barges had been filled with combustibles—faggots, bales and tins of paraffin—sufficient to burn to the ground the largest storehouse in London. Within an hour the whole of this vast material had been conveyed into the Armoury.

Larcey moved excitedly among his companions, arranging the sacks in heaps through the two bottom stories, soaking them with paraffin, and piling stacks of rifles on

top of them. Innumerable rows of potential bonfires were soon scattered about in every room. And when all was ready, and the insensible guards had been carried on to the boats and all his companions had retired to the terrace, he moved through the building alone with a lamp in his hand, setting a light to each of the pyres in turn.

The screw of the little steam-tug began to beat the water once more. The moorings were cast off and the two barges glided after their pilot down the river. Standing in the stern of the second boat, Larcey looked across the waters at the dim white outline of the vast pile. A faint crimson glow was stealing into the windows, revealing each great glass frame for an instant as a dull red space, and then, as the conflagration within swelled into a fierce torrent, the fire could be seen leaping and sparkling within the whole length of the building. Half an hour later, when the regiment of National Guards arrived on the scene, the Armoury was a mass of flames.

. . . . . .

For some moments the members of Council watched the bright reflection in the sky in awestruck silence. All remained seated around the long baize-covered table, exchanging glances of dismay or gazing out apprehensively into the night. Everyone felt that the fate of the nation was hanging in the balance. Presently the suave tones of Crannock broke the painful stillness.

"This puts the lid on," he observed, with a grim smile on his lemon-coloured cheeks.

"But for the guns I shouldn't care a damn," cried Hothersall wrathfully. "Beastly white ghost of a place."

Then the voice of Anymoon was heard—a tremulous voice, infinitely weary.

"It is an unfortunate event," he said, "but there is no occasion for alarm."

And as if in answer to his words the telephone bell rang once more.

Darell crossed the room and placed the receiver to his ear. An instant of tense silence followed. After

listening attentively to the message, the Secretary turned quietly to the President.

"There are a couple of destroyers at the mouth of the Thames. . . . A landing-party has taken possession of the Arsenal. . . . A similar force is anchored in the Tyne. . . . Armstrong's is protected also."

Mrs. Rhyle clapped her hands hysterically.

"We shall beat them," she cried; "we shall beat them yet."

"It depends whether we can turn out as many rifles as we want in time," said Crannock imperturbably.

"The moral effect will be enough," retorted Mrs. Rhyle.

"Lucky we had this handful of warships left," muttered Hothersall.

"But who gave them the order to proceed?" demanded Phillips, with flashing eyes. "It was a stroke of genius."

A tired voice, almost inaudible, answered the inquiry.

"I did," said Anymoon.

There was a hushed silence. Everyone gazed at the President in wonder and admiration. Several of the women smiled rapturously. Hothersall smote his fist triumphantly upon the table.

"I foresaw what would happen," continued Anymoon tranquilly. "So I made my preparations."

The telephone bell rang again. A smile passed over Darell's clear-cut features as he listened to the communication.

"It appears to have been a storm in a tea-cup after all," he observed. "A message has just come through from Manchester to say that a large body of rebels under Cohen has been surrounded by the National Service forces outside Bolton. . . . They have offered to surrender, and our commanding officer is arranging terms."

"Terms!" cried Mrs. Rhyle, losing all self-control. "We will listen to no terms. . . . That villainous little Jew must be shot to-morrow."

"He will have to have a fair trial," said Phillips.

"Thank the Lord, we'll all be able to sleep quietly in our beds," murmured Hothersall fervently.

Mrs. Rhyle was standing in her place at the bottom of the long table with her hand upraised, appealing for silence. Her features betrayed the excitement that was surging within her, but she was striving bravely to conquer her emotion. Tears were glistening in her eyes.

"Let us take a lesson from this experience," she cried. "What the nation needs most is twenty years' resolute government. . . . It should be ruled by a benevolent autocracy for its own good. . . . Let us take advantage of the necessity of the time, Mr. President. . . . Proclaim a Protectorate, like Cromwell, and retain the executive in your own hands. . . . Let the present members of Council be nominated for life."

"I like your cheek," murmured Hothersall, with a face of wonder.

"We have an historical precedent," continued Mrs. Rhyle, gazing wistfully at Anymoon. "Be brave of heart, sir, like the first great Protector. . . . The women will support you with their whole strength, and I can answer for the Communes."

Anymoon smiled wearily, shaking his head.

"The Spirit of the Age is not the same as it was in the time of Cromwell," he answered.

Mrs. Rhyle bit her lip angrily.

"Then take warning, Mr. President," she went on, and there was a ring of menace in her silvery voice. "What you have not the courage to do another will perform. . . . This is not a time for half-measures . . . we need Thorough."

"Aye, there's summat in that," said Hothersall.

"Do you suggest, madam, that you can carry the nation with you?" demanded Phillips cynically.

"I think not," muttered Crannock.

"What does that matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Rhyle scornfully. "You forget that my party has still a majority!"

"It's melting away," sneered Hothersall.

"But it is still a majority," said Mrs. Rhyle, with flashing eyes.

An hour later most of the members of Council had departed. More good news had come from the north, and the meeting had been adjourned until the next day. Anymoon still remained in the President's chair, with his elbow on the table and his head resting upon his hand. A group of excited women were talking earnestly together in a far corner of the room.

The telephone bell rang again. Mrs. Rhyle answered it.

"It is a message for you, Mr. President . . . from the Nursing Home."

Anymoon started to his feet.

"My wife!"

"She is doing as well as can be expected," replied Mrs. Rhyle, with the receiver to her ear. "But——"

"Tell me——" cried Anymoon.

"Twins!" answered Mrs. Rhyle laconically, with a face of marble.

There was a little flutter of excitement amongst the women. Mrs. Rhyle dropped the receiver as though it was red-hot.

Anymoon was moving towards the door.

"Mr. President!"

Mrs. Rhyle's voice was stern and insistent. Anymoon paused involuntarily.

"This will make all the difference in the world," she continued in shrill, staccato tones. "We cannot go on as we have done in the past."

Anymoon gazed at her in bewilderment.

"How can we survive the ridicule?" she proceeded. "If we are merely to remain *the servants* of the nation we shall fall amidst a howl of laughter. . . . I at least refuse to be the victim of absurdity."

There was a murmur of approval amongst the women.

"It is only the autocrat who may disregard appearances," she went on remorselessly. "No elected President can become a laughing-stock and keep his place. . . . You have the choice of two alternatives. . . . Unless you make yourself master you will be swept away. . . . But I do not intend to be swept away with you. . . . If

you have not the courage to make yourself master I will show you that I have the courage to make myself mistress."

It was the first time that she had even attempted to coerce the President openly. It was impossible to misunderstand the significance of her words. They were an ultimatum that, if he did not obey her wishes and proclaim himself Protector, she herself would endeavour to impose a despotism of her own upon the Commonwealth. And it was probable, now that Cohen's abortive rebellion appeared to have been crushed, that she still possessed the power.

He looked into her stern, unflinching eyes, and he knew that unless he did what she commanded he would have to reckon with another enemy. Yet, although he was not determinedly hostile to her proposals, never having weighed them over in his mind, his soul revolted against dictation.

"May a President never have twins?" he demanded rebelliously.

"I know of no precedent," she replied, with a relentless smile.

Anymoon bowed mechanically, and, turning quickly, made his way from the room. Anxiety for his wife tormented him, and his brain was not sufficiently alert for argument. In a few moments he was striding through the darkness along Pall Mall in the direction of Northumberland Avenue.

When he returned to the Palace an hour later, after a brief interview with Mrs. Anymoon, which was all that the matron would permit, he felt much more easy in his mind. Not only was his wife still alive, but she appeared little the worse for the tribulation through which she had passed! He was apprehensive on her account no longer. It was a splendid and unexpected dénouement.

Yet he was feeling very ill. The heat seemed to choke him, and his brain was whirling. Slowly and painfully he managed to crawl upstairs and entered his bedroom. Switching on the light, he surveyed himself in

the mirror of his dressing-table. His face was crimson; there was a feverish light in his sunken eyes. Undressing himself listlessly, he got into bed. The ominous threat of Mrs. Rhyle kept ringing in his ears, but he felt wholly incapable of dealing with the situation. For almost the first time in his life he was timorous and perplexed. His courage seemed utterly to have failed him; his thoughts had no coherent meaning.

"I believe I am going to have a serious illness," he murmured. "Else how is it that I cannot think?"

He tossed to and fro restlessly.

"I wonder what is the matter with me?" he reflected. "Why should I be unable to make up my mind?"

Dozing off a moment later, he awakened with a start.

"If I am no better to-morrow," he cried resentfully, "that woman will be able to do just as she likes."

He clenched his fist angrily.

"I believe she wants an excuse to get rid of me," he muttered; "but she would make an infernal mess of things."

And while he was meditating thus, he dropped off into a fitful slumber.

PART IV

THE BEE-HIVE

I

THROUGH what seemed a stifling, interminable night, Anymoon lay tossing on his bed, the periods of feverish sleep broken by long intervals of restlessness. For many weary hours he was hovering between consciousness and unconsciousness, incapable of arousing himself into wakefulness and powerless to sink into oblivion. His brain was on fire; he could not raise his head from the pillow. Finally, exhausted nature came to his relief, and he passed into a heavy slumber.

It was still pitch dark when he awoke at last with a start. He felt wonderfully refreshed, and in a moment he realised that the fever had left him. Stretching out his hand, his fingers touched the electric switch on the wall at his bedside. Mechanically he turned on the light. A metal clock on the mantelpiece pointed to the hour of two. It dawned upon him that it was night again, and that he must have slept throughout the whole of the day.

Throwing off the blankets, he sprang out of bed, at the same time gazing around the apartment in surprise. His surroundings were entirely strange to him. All the familiar objects had disappeared, and he realised with astonishment that he was no longer in his own bedroom. It was a small, sparsely-furnished chamber, with white-washed walls and one single strip of carpet on the

linoleum-covered floor. On a deal chair by the side of the camp-bed lay the clothes that he had worn on the previous evening. Nothing else seemed to be his own.

Staggering to the window, he drew up the blind. Instead of the ancient courtyard of St. James's Palace he gazed out upon a spacious square, as vast as the Place de la Concorde, its four sides outlined in the darkness by the surrounding lamps. In a moment he seemed to divine what had happened. He must have had a serious illness, during which he had been taken from his own home to some public hospital. Until now he had lain unconscious in the grip of a fierce fever, lost to the world, since the night of Cohen's insurrection.

How long ago was that? What had happened since? These were the first thoughts that surged through his bewildered brain. Weeks might have elapsed, perhaps months; for he was feeling strong and well now, and instinct seemed to tell him that his malady had been a long and desperate one. He knew intuitively that a great gulf of weary days stretched between him and that tempestuous evening when he had seen the glare of the burning Armoury in the sky behind the towers of Westminster.

He began to dress in haste. His first impulse was to leave this hospital-prison and reveal himself once more to his fellow-creatures. It was certain that the Commonwealth must be in sore need of him. All the details of his last interview with Mrs. Rhyle flashed through his mind, and he recalled her direful threats with sudden consternation. What mischief had this woman wrought since he was ill? Was it too late now to checkmate her? He must act at once, and act swiftly!

He remembered what she had said to him—that ominous ultimatum, delivered in the full consciousness of her power, when she must have been aware that unless she struck at once the opportunity would never return to her.

"I do not intend to be swept away with you. . . . Unless you have the courage to make yourself master, I

will show you that I have the courage to make myself mistress."

Since he had been out of the way there was nothing to hinder her. Unless Cohen had prevailed, which was improbable, she must have succeeded in establishing the iron despotism for which she craved. He realised more vividly than ever that it had always been her ambition to get rid of him. It was unlikely that she would have shrunk from risk when a lucky chance had removed him temporarily from her path. Moreover, there was nothing inconceivable in the triumph of her dogmas over those of the rebellious Jew. She represented the theory of the apotheosis of the State—in which the individual was an inconsiderable atom, existing as a mere human automaton —the logical and inevitable conclusion of a perfect Communism. Cohen stood wholly for an anarchy, where discipline was of no account and every man was free to do what was right in his own eyes—a species of co-operative altruism, visionary and Utopian. Certainly, the machinery of the existing order of things, erected to enforce the principles of uncompromising Socialism, seemed more adapted to the former than to the latter environment.

Strange to say, he had no anxiety for his wife or children. The thought of them never once occurred to him. Some extraordinary influence seemed to have steeped his senses in oblivion, making him cognisant only of those things that appertained to himself and to his office. All his solicitude was for the State.

As soon as he was dressed he opened the door of the room and sallied out into the passage. It was illumined throughout its long length by one brilliant light, concealed behind a thick sheet of opaque green glass, placed midway in the ceiling. Descending a steep stone staircase, he passed by four similar corridors, with a double row of innumerable doorways opening into each, and arrived on the ground floor. There was no one in the lofty entrance hall, and he made his way unmolested through the open porch into the square.

The night air was warm, and obviously it was still

summer or early autumn. The tall lamps, each encased in a translucent green globe, revealed everything within their radius as clearly as if it were daylight. By the side of the pavement a huge barrack-like building, with a lofty piazza running along its base, stretched as far as the eye could see.

While he was hesitating which direction he should take, he saw a figure advancing towards him.

II

It was a strange figure, apparently a foreigner, dressed in a loose flowing blouse that reached as far as the knees, beneath which were a pair of baggy trousers. The material of the costume appeared to be a thin rough serge, in colour a light indigo. The boots, laced as far as the swell of the calf and into which the trousers were tucked, seemed to be soled with a thick layer of flannel, for they made no sound as they trod over the stone flags. The resemblance to a Chinaman was enhanced by the head-dress, which was a round black cap, behind which a blonde pig-tail fell down upon the shoulders. Anymoon stepped forward quickly to intercept the stranger.

"Good evening," he observed, wondering whether the person could speak English.

Two faded blue eyes glanced at him stolidly through a pair of spectacles.

"I've lost my way," continued Anymoon impatiently. "How shall I get to St. James's Palace?"

The stranger surveyed him leisurely from his head to his boots, surprised perhaps, so Anymoon fancied, by his tall grey hat and frock-coat.

"I don't know," came the answer, in a thin, toneless voice.

"You're a foreigner?" said Anymoon.

"You are one, I presume," replied the stranger.

"But aren't you?" continued Anymoon.

The stranger shook his head. Anymoon backed a pace or two until he was standing in the full glare of a street lamp, when he removed his tall hat.

"Then, of course, you know me?"

Again the stranger shook his head. The President stepped back another pace involuntarily.

"And this is fame!" he ejaculated. A throb of actual pain shot through his heart. "Good God!" he muttered. "Have they forgotten me so soon?"

The dull, fish-like eyes continued to gaze at him listlessly through their spectacles.

"I knew you were a foreigner," the stranger observed quietly, "you talk so much."

"Don't you ever talk?" answered Anymoon indignantly.

"As little as we can. . . . It interferes with work."

"By Jove," exclaimed Anymoon joyously, striking his fist into his palm, "the world must have reformed suddenly, while I have been ill."

The stranger regarded him more intently.

"Where do you come from?" he inquired, after a long pause.

"Look here," said Anymoon, "let us understand one another. What day of the month is this?"

"July the first!"

Anymoon lifted his hands above his head in an agony of amazement.

"Great heavens! . . . And I was taken ill on August the fifth. . . . Is it possible that I have been unconscious for nearly a year!"

The face of the stranger—a white, expressionless, parchment-like face, with small, sharp features and sunken cheeks—remained as immobile as a mask.

"Tell me," cried Anymoon, with a sudden impulse, "is Mrs. Rhyle your President?"

The faded blue eyes showed no glimmer of intelligence. Anymoon repeated the question impatiently.

"We have no President," replied the stranger.

In an instant Anymoon had hazarded a guess at what had happened. With ice at his heart, he divined that the noble Constitution that he had built up for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen must have fallen in ruins. It appeared obvious that the anarchist Jew had swept everything before him.

"Do not tell me that Cohen has come into power?" he faltered.

The pale eyelashes flickered behind the spectacles.

"I do not know these names," the stranger answered.

Anymoon glanced around in bewilderment. The green glow of one of the lamps shone down upon the pavement, casting a bright, eerie triangle all around him, and far away along the deserted square similar pyramid shapes of light were glimmering in the darkness until they faded into minute specks in the far distance, giving the impression of infinite space and stupendous solitude. He seemed suddenly to be confronted with eternity and the immeasurable.

"How long have I slept?" he murmured.

The white, mask-like face in front of him was motionless and inscrutable. With sudden impulse he put his fingers on the creature's shoulder and shook him forcibly. The structure of the stranger's frame seemed soft and invertebrate, and it was as though one had laid hands on a figure stuffed with straw.

"You must have heard of these names," he exclaimed rebelliously, wondering if he was dreaming.

"We have no names now," the stranger responded.

The words fell ominously upon Anymoon's ears, suggestive of a great gulf between the present and the past. He peered into the pallid, shrunken features eagerly.

"How old are you?" he demanded.

"Perhaps twenty," replied the strange creature. "We take no count of age now."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Anymoon. "Can I have remained asleep for two generations?"

Something of the sort was possible, he knew, without giving credence to the Rip Van Winkle legend. He had heard of persons who had lost their reason for years and years, awaking at last from what was equivalent to a trance apparently as sane as ever. Some strange mental malady of this sort must have afflicted him. But how long, how long was it since he had been President of the British Commonwealth?

The stranger was moving away. Anymoon stepped in his path and intercepted him.

"You are not an Englishman," he cried, in a loud, insistent voice.

"I was born in England," came the listless, unemotional reply.

"But you must be an Oriental," persisted Anymoon.

"Why?"

"You look like one."

"We all look the same."

And while Anymoon stood swaying in amazement the stranger disappeared through the porch door of the great building hard by.

"How long have I been ill?" cried Anymoon, in despair. "The old world seems to have passed away."

With bent head he tottered down the lamp-lit pavement, not caring whither he went.

III

As he walked along he met many more strange creatures, exactly similar in form and in features and in dress to the one he had encountered first. Sometimes they were alone and sometimes groups of them marched along together, but they were all as silent as the grave, and he never saw one of them speak a word to another. They did not pay the slightest heed to him, gliding along with noiseless footsteps and expressionless faces, peering

vacantly through their spectacles. He could not summon courage to address any of them.

Presently, when he had reached the end of the square, he found himself standing before the entrance of a vast edifice, which was obviously a factory. The busy hum of machinery sounded from within. He could hear the clang of beaten metal. Crowds of blue-clad figures with black caps and blonde pig-tails were going in or passing out. Curiosity leading him, he followed a party of them through the wide folding-doors.

He found himself in an immense building, brilliantly lighted by opalescent lamps, with a gigantic roof-span of glass and iron like a railway station, but infinitely more spacious than any railway station he had ever seen. Indistinct memories of visits to the Crystal Palace in his childhood involuntarily recurred to him, but this place was incomparably more vast than the Crystal Palace. It might have been half a mile in length, perhaps longer, and its breadth was almost as great, while the huge glass dome above his head was many hundred yards high. The whole of the floor-space seemed to be composed of smooth, level concrete.

Along the sides of the building were long rows of lathes and complex fitting-machines, around which little groups of black caps were labouring assiduously. The heavy beat of great steam-hammers reverberated through the place amidst bright coruscations of metal sparks. But the object that riveted his eyes was a stupendous piece of machinery which occupied the centre of the floor.

It resembled a gigantic biplane, for high in the air above two broad planes with a span of several hundred yards stretched far across the building. Apparently they were composed of thin metallic sheets, for they were not translucent and glittered like steel. Below these stupendous wings, which were joined together by stout masts and a forest of stays, there was a stately hull as vast as that of a ten-thousand-ton liner. And to his amazement Anymoon perceived that it was floating in a gigantic tank, just wide enough to contain it, which

seemed to reach to the far extremity of the great Crystal Palace. A gangway led up to the lofty deck. Four huge propellers, like the fly-wheels of some immense steam-engine, stood out from the stern.

One of the blue-clad figures was standing by the side of the tank, looking up at the tall hull. Anymoon sprang towards him, clutching him by the shoulder.

"What is that?" he cried, pointing to the great machine.

Two cod-fish eyes scanned him listlessly through a pair of spectacles.

"An aeroplane," was the answer.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Anymoon.

"So you are a foreigner," said the blue figure, with a slight intonation of patronage.

"Can it fly?"

"Certainly."

"Where is it going?"

"Exeter."

"How long will that take?"

"Half an hour."

"My God!" cried Anymoon, "I must have been asleep for a century."

The blue-clad stranger continued to gaze at him with lack-lustre eyes.

"Would you like to travel by it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Anymoon. "When does it start?"

"As soon as it is daylight."

Already the opalescent lamps were beginning to die down one by one and the first beams of morning were stealing through the high glass roof overhead.

"I am a stranger," faltered Anymoon. "You must tell me all I want to know. . . . Do men travel only by air now?"

"Yes, in the country; but there are the roof-railways in towns."

"Have you no trains or motor-cars?"

"Not now. . . . Why should we crawl on earth when we can fly through the sky?"

"But there are ships?"

"Only like this," answered the stranger, pointing to the great aeroplane. "They can float on the sea if necessary."

"The fishing-boats?"

"There are none. . . . We don't catch fish."

"But how can men get to their work if there are no cars or trains?"

"There are the small monoplanes. . . . We live close to the business we are doing."

"Don't you sometimes travel for pleasure?"

"There is no pleasure but work."

"Upon my soul!" cried Anymoon. "You would have had a rough time with the Trade Unions in the old days."

"Human beings are mere cogs in a great wheel."

"Tell me everything," continued Anymoon pathetically. "Be a little more voluble. . . . I have to drag everything out of you. . . . You people seem to have lost the power of speech."

"Some do not speak at all. . . . It is not necessary."

"Magnificent!" ejaculated Anymoon. "Then the wind-bag is no more?"

The stranger shook his head with a vacant stare.

"Have you no schools?" continued Anymoon.

The stranger nodded.

"What do they teach you?"

"Reading—writing—figures; but of course all these things are only stepping-stones to science."

"Good—you all specialise. . . . You are all taught science?"

"That is the whole sum and substance of life."

"What is your particular branch?"

"The same as all . . . the study of transit."

"Aeroplanes?"

"Every other problem has been solved."

"So you devote your lives to making aeroplanes?"

"We have other duties, of course, but that is our one great task . . . to invent and to repair. . . . It absorbs us all."

"Impossible!"

The stranger pointed to the great airship.

"Look at that machine . . . all the resources of this aerodrome are devoted to keep it running."

A siren sounded from the deck of the vessel. Crowds of blue-clad figures swarmed around the side of the tank and began to clamber up the gangway. The lamps had all gone out and daylight was flooding the building.

"The ship will start in five minutes," observed the stranger.

"Where are these going?" inquired Anymoon, pointing to the blue-clad crowd.

"To Devonshire."

"Why?"

"There is work for them to do."

"Who ordered them to go?"

"No one . . . they know that they are wanted."

"Exemplary souls! We could have done with a couple of million of them when I was a boy."

The stranger pointed to long rows of benches, which were scattered up and down the vast floor-space, filled with blue-black figures, sitting motionless and expectant.

"All these are waiting for work. . . . As soon as there is a vacancy anywhere they take their place. . . . Wherever there is need of them they go."

"Who tells them?"

"They know."

"Instinct?"

"It is one's nature to work."

The stranger led the way towards the side of the dock, and, following him mechanically, Anymoon mounted the steep stairs.

IV

The whole of the promenade deck was enclosed by thick plate-glass windows, being a protection against the wind-

pressure, as Anymoon learnt from his companions, for the airship travelled at a speed of more than three hundred miles an hour. Anxious to explore the great vessel, the ex-President made his way down the broad staircase into the interior. A series of lofty saloons extended along the entire length and breadth of the main deck, leading from one to the other. There were similar suites, the same in every respect, on the deck below. No evidence of luxury was apparent anywhere. There was not a single private cabin; only three vast apartments, sparsely furnished as lounge, dormitory, and dining-room.

A meal was being served in the eating-hall on the main deck as Anymoon passed through, the long, bare tables being surrounded by blue-clad figures. A great deal of bread seemed to be consumed, and syrups from various bottles, largely diluted with water, were drunk by all. There were several hot dishes of vegetables also, among which Anymoon recognised porridge and boiled rice, but none of them appeared to be appetising, and not one of the passengers ate with any relish. Deglutition with them seemed to be a mere mechanical process, indulged in merely to appease hunger, not from enjoyment. It sometimes happened that there was not enough of attendants to serve those who were feeding; but whenever this occurred some of the blue-clad beings rose immediately from the tables and proceeded to wait assiduously on their fellows.

"Your organisation is wonderful," said Anymoon to his cicerone, who was still at his side.

"It is human nature," answered the stranger.

"Then it has changed, by Jove, since my day!" replied Anymoon. "Those beings appear to enjoy waiting better than feeding themselves."

"Because it is work. . . . Eating is a tiresome necessity, which unfortunately we cannot do without."

The siren sounded once more and the throb of machinery vibrated through the great hall. Anymoon moved hastily across to one of the port-holes. The ship was gliding along its water channel, for he could see the wall

of the aerodrome flowing swiftly before his eyes. In another moment the vessel had passed beyond the high glass roof as a train used to move from a railway station and was out in the open daylight. For an instant it clung to the surface of its tank, and then, as the planes took their grip upon the air, it began to soar aloft as lightly as a bird. Anymoon caught the flash of a broad river below which he took to be the Thames. Then the roofs of the city had disappeared.

He realised that they were moving at a miraculous speed, but still he could perceive that the face of the country over which they were flying had changed completely since last he had beheld it. Not a tree or hedge was to be seen anywhere, nor even a village. The land was divided into fields of almost equal size, and there were houses dotted about here and there at regular intervals, as though the inhabitants had been distributed in proportion to the work that they had to perform. An elaborate system of intensive cultivation seemed to be carried on, for he beheld white flashes of light everywhere, indicating the presence of glass frames or greenhouses. Apparently there was not a lane or highway anywhere.

Turning impatiently, he beckoned to his guide, who came to him obediently.

"Have you no roads?" he demanded.

"They are not necessary."

"So all your traffic is done by airships?"

"Certainly, for it is the best way."

Anymoon gazed around the vast dining-hall, staring gloomily at the patient, ruminating creatures seated at the long tables. Not a word was being spoken by any of them. Everyone sat motionless, looking listlessly in front of him. Only the servitors, who were busy with their work, displayed any evidence of intelligence. Yet it was evident that these people belonged to a highly intellectual race with a stupendous power of discipline and organisation.

"I see that you are all vegetarians," he observed.

"We have no animals," answered his guide.

"How about milk?"

"There is none."

"Extraordinary," ejaculated Anymoon. "But you have eggs?"

"There are no birds," replied the stranger.

Anymoon gasped for breath.

"What do you eat?"

"Just what you see."

"But have you no fruits?"

The stranger shook his head.

"They are not necessary," he replied.

Anymoon frowned darkly, being what used to be termed an excellent trencherman.

"I understand," he murmured. "You produce just sufficient food to keep body and soul together."

"That is all that is necessary," came the dreary answer.

"All the pleasures in life seem to have gone," groaned Anymoon.

"There is work," said the stranger.

Anymoon turned on him savagely.

"What incomparable blacklegs you would have made," he thundered, "in the old days!"

Presently the great aeroplane began to descend. The configuration of the land became distinctly visible.

"That is Exeter," remarked the stranger, pointing to a small collection of "sky-scrapers" in the far distance.

"It looks like a huge granary," said Anymoon.

"It is," replied the other.

As the airship drew nearer to the earth Anymoon perceived that each of the great fields was bordered by a narrow path, made apparently of concrete, and upon several of these a small aeroplane was resting, while one or two were just rising from the ground.

"Every hundred acres has its flying machine," observed the stranger. "They collect the produce of the land and take it to one of the central warehouses."

Exmouth evidently had been transmogrified into one of these store-places, for Anymoon observed that a block of

buildings was standing at the mouth of the broad estuary on the site of the picturesque watering-place.

A moment later the great airship had glided down gently on to the surface of the river beneath a gigantic aerodrome, similar to that from which he had started. There were spacious quays on either side, filled with large cases of merchandise. Scarcely had the vessel come to a standstill in its dock than a couple of elevators began to lift the goods on board.

"I must leave you now," said the stranger to Anymoon.

"Where are you going?"

"To work in the fields."

"Supposing you are not wanted?"

"I shall go on to another place. . . . There is always work to be done somewhere."

Anymoon coughed impatiently.

"I shall go back to London. . . . I am not at all interested in the country. . . . It seems to have been reduced to one dead dismal level of uniformity."

"Yes, it is all the same."

The crowd of blue-clad figures hurried ashore and another tribe of them came on board. In a few moments the cases on the quays had been stowed away in the hold. Five minutes later the sound of the siren was heard again, and, planing swiftly from beneath the great glass roof, the vessel rose lightly into the air.

V

Anymoon walked up to the promenade deck and stood near the lofty bridge in the bows from which the ship was steered. Presently, to his amazement, the blue-clad pilot rang a shrill electric-bell, whereupon one of the new passengers, who had been sitting on a bench close by, rose immediately and took his place. Ten minutes later a

similar incident occurred, and this time Anymoon intercepted the late steersman as he was descending.

"Is it possible that you can all pilot this aeroplane?" he demanded, in wonder.

The creature he had addressed glanced at him without any evidence of surprise.

"Naturally . . . one has to be able to do everything."

"You must be priceless as domestic servants," exclaimed Anymoon, careless of the anachronism.

The ex-pilot gazed at him for a moment without speaking.

"I suppose you are a foreign delegate?" he remarked.

"What is that?" inquired Anymoon.

"They often visit us to buy our latest aeroplane."

"You are supreme in aerial navigation," said Anymoon, a light breaking upon him.

"Naturally . . . else we should have nothing to exchange for the commodities we want from abroad."

"What are they?"

"Wool and cotton, oil and many of the metals. . . . Apart from these things other countries do not interest us."

"Then you are dependent upon the foreigner for your clothes?"

"Unfortunately they are necessary, but we make them as simple as we can."

"Yes, they'd hardly be suitable for Ascot," retorted Anymoon, perpetrating another anachronism, as he gazed contemptuously upon the other's blue serge garments.

"We regard clothes as of no importance at all."

"So I observe," said Anymoon dryly. "Where are they made?"

"The cloth is manufactured where it always was . . . in Yorkshire and the west of England."

"Can you dye and weave it yourself?"

"Of course . . . one has to be able to do everything."

Anymoon drew a long, deep breath.

"I know that work is an all-absorbing delight to every one of you. . . . I have learnt also that you take no pleasure in what you eat or in what you wear. . . . Most

of the old joys of life appeal to you no longer. . . . Tell me, have you no other pleasure except labour?"

"Oh yes—to sit in the sunlight."

Anymoon laughed derisively.

"But in this England of ours the sun does not shine for more than fifty days in the year."

"It is easy to fly in an airship for two thousand miles into the southern seas."

"And the ships go there?"

"Every day . . . they rest for an hour or two and then return."

"But aren't they packed to suffocation?"

"Oh no; we travel in our turn."

"Well, upon my word, you are the most orderly race of creatures that the world has ever seen."

"We only exist for the community."

Anymoon laughed again, remembering all his strenuous toiling for the same ideal.

"Then I suppose that none of you live long?"

"No . . . but what does that matter? . . . Things go on just the same."

"With your knowledge of science, I wonder that you have not succeeded in prolonging human life," said Anymoon reflectively.

"We have never tried. . . . Science has more important matters to consider."

"But what?"

"Mechanics!"

"Bah!" cried Anymoon, in a tumult of scorn. "I might have foreseen whither the world was tending long ago. . . . The automobile was of far more account than the poor child whom it murdered."

Another of the passengers had ascended the bridge, and the pilot who had just been relieved came down on deck. The airship was now flying only a few hundred yards above the ground. Anymoon could see the busy toilers in the fields and in the nursery gardens. Many small aeroplanes, constructed for work on the land, were flitting from farm to farm. Several of their hangars

were distinctly visible. Evidently every one of the inhabitants was as much at home in a flying machine as their ancestors had been on a bicycle.

With a dismal sigh Anymoon hurried up to the steersman, who had just come off the bridge.

"Look here," he said roughly. "Surely there is some other pleasure besides work and sitting in the sun? . . . I see that I am going to have a dreadfully thin time of it. . . . Are there no theatres?"

The ex-pilot, who was alike in every respect to all those with whom he had conversed previously, surveyed him with a placid stare.

"They have been extinct for many years."

"Well, our managers were asking for it. . . . But you have cinemas?"

"There are no pictures," answered the blue-clad creature ambiguously.

"I didn't suppose there were any portrait painters," said Anymoon, with a glance at the face in spectacles. "But don't some of you like music?"

"We have no time for music."

"Ghost of Sir Thomas!" exclaimed Anymoon, "don't you even run to a gramophone or a German band?"

The stranger shook his head.

"This is boycotting the Hun with a vengeance. . . . Are there no polite arts? . . . What about books?"

"There are scientific books."

"Still, you don't read those for fun."

"No, for instruction. . . . There is no pleasure in reading."

"Then you have no novelists or poets, and perhaps no journalists?"

"No."

"Confide in me," said Anymoon in a whisper. "Were they put to death painlessly, or did they get their deserts?"

"All the books and pictures were destroyed long ago."

"Why?"

"They were unnecessary."

"I wouldn't like to contradict you absolutely."

"And, of course, they were incompatible with equality."

Anymoon gave a shout of triumph.

"Oh that my contemporaries were alive! . . . You people would satisfy the most exacting of them. . . . Evolution has reached its limits at last, and we have the Bee-Hive!"

"We tolerate the bees," responded the stranger nonchalantly. "Clover fields are kept especially for them."

"And flowers?"

"Flowers are not necessary."

"Unnecessary!" echoed Anymoon, rolling the syllables lovingly on his tongue. "It is refreshing to find that you folks have substituted a blessed word in place of our damnable old cliché democracy." He clenched his fists together fiercely. "I'm like all the great rebels," he muttered. "In my old age I have become a Tory."

He walked along the wide-spreading decks, strolling down the broad stairway into the saloons again. The frugal meal was still in progress, and the weird blue-clad figures were masticating gloomily or waiting assiduously on their fellows. The adjacent sitting-room, a spacious apartment amidships with long rows of wooden forms, was crowded with them, and Anymoon noticed with a smile that most of them were seated on the starboard side, where the sun was glinting through the port-holes. Walking forward, he peered into the sleeping-saloon, a great chamber intersected by long rows of iron bedsteads resembling the steerage accommodation in an old liner. A Spartan simplicity reigned everywhere. Obviously, the new race of mankind had no idea of comfort, or regarded it as unnecessary.

When he returned to the promenade deck the airship was planing to earth again. He perceived a broad river gleaming below, encompassed by lofty buildings as far as the eye could reach. A moment later the vessel had swooped down into a mighty tank and was gliding beneath the glass roof of an aerodrome exactly similar

to that from which it had started. Anymoon caught sight of one of the pilots with whom he had conversed gazing out of one of the windows.

"Where are we?" he demanded.

"London."

"When does the aeroplane start again?"

"In five minutes."

"To Devonshire?"

"No, to Inverness."

"And I suppose that will take only two hours?"

The pilot nodded, and was following a crowd of his fellow-creatures towards the gangway.

"One moment, my friend," said Anymoon, laying his hand upon his arm. "I have implicit faith in your veracity, but one thing that you told me I cannot credit. . . . You inferred that no one in these days takes the slightest interest in dress. . . Now, I am willing to believe that this is true of your men, but what about the women?"

The pair of fish-like eyes gazed at him without the flicker of a lash.

"The love of dress is an ineradicable feminine instinct," continued Anymoon sententiously. "Even the naked savage rejoices in her nose-ring or her string of beads. . . . We can trace the passion as far back as the ancient Egyptians and the children of Israel. . . . Half woman's joy in life comes from her clothes."

The round eyes were still expressionless. Anymoon ran his hand gently over the creature's sleeve.

"This butcher-blue of yours may be all right for the men, but how about your women? . . . What do they wear? . . . Show me some of them."

The tired, toneless voice answered him:

"I am a woman!"

Anymoon's hand smote his forehead, knocking off the tall grey hat. His brain was reeling and a swarm of *muscæ volitantes* danced before his eyes.

"You are a woman!" he gasped.

The curt, orthodox nod followed.

"My God!" cried Anymoon. "Mrs. Pankhurst would disown you."

The other waved a hand towards the crowd of indigo figures that was moving across the deck.

"Those are all women."

"Do you mean to tell me on your Bible oath that these blue, black-capped, pig-tailed monstrosities are your best specimens of English beauty?" shouted the indignant Anymoon.

"They are the workers."

"I didn't expect you to suggest that they were ornaments," retorted Anymoon, picking up his hat.

"All that you have seen are women."

"Haven't you any who are not workers?"

"Yes, there are the breeders."

"So you don't breed from those?" said Anymoon, jerking his thumb towards the blue-clad crowd.

"They have no generative power."

"Thank God for that! . . . Are the breeders like them?"

"No, they are beautiful."

"Show me some of them?"

"You can see them in their homes."

"Where are their homes?"

"Everywhere."

And the worker began to walk away.

"One question more," said Anymoon, following her. "What about the men?"

"The drones!" and there was a slight inflection of contempt in the reply.

"Are all men drones?"

"They toil not, neither do they spin," the worker responded. "We use them for breeding."

"Ah," said Anymoon, with a smile. "Even in my day some of you honestly believed that that was all they were fit for. . . . And there were some who begrudged them even that job."

"Yes, unfortunately they are necessary," answered the worker, and she hurried away.

VI

MINGLING with the crowd that was passing along the gangway, Anymoon walked down on to the quay. The arched roof spanned the air many hundred yards above his head; the busy machinery was scattered over the vast floor-space. Turning for an instant, he gazed in wonder at the graceful hull of the aeroplane, and marvelled at the mighty wings that swept far across the great hangar on either side.

"It can ride through any storm at sea as well as fly," he thought to himself. "We might have made something like it if we hadn't been so wrapped up in politics."

He sauntered to the end of the building, following a stream of workers which was moving towards the central doorway. Passing into a lofty entrance-hall, he perceived a range of large lifts like those of a Tube station. Out of curiosity he entered the nearest of them. One of the passengers pressed a button, and the cage was hurled aloft at lightning speed. In a few seconds it stopped in front of a broad platform, alongside which a long line of saloon carriages was standing. The iron gates of the lift were swept open, and the crowd hurried into the waiting train. Scarcely had Anymoon walked into one of the compartments when it began to move out of the station.

The line of railway ran over the top of the roofs, all of which were on a dead level. Apparently, there were no streets anywhere. Every one of the buildings was in the form of a huge parallelogram, surrounding a spacious quadrangle, closely joined to one another, so that the city resembled a gigantic honeycomb. The style of architecture gave a dreary uniformity to its appearance, and it seemed even more vast than it did in the old days by reason of its strange conformation. Not a spire

nor a tower was visible and the parks had all disappeared.

Nothing but a flat, uncompromising vista of bricks and mortar could be seen as far as the eye could reach.

"Evidently architecture has been equalised too," murmured Anymoon.

He turned to the blue-clad worker sitting next to him on the hard, cushionless seat.

"Madam," he observed deferentially. "Why have you so many large squares?"

She cast a casual glance at him through her large spectacles.

"So that we can sit in the sun."

"Don't you ever walk?"

"Our work gives us all the exercise we require. . . . It's not necessary."

Obviously, she took him for a foreigner, as they all did.

He hesitated a moment, blushing hotly.

"My dear lady," he stammered at last, "it is in your power to do me a kindness. . . . I should like to see some of the breeders."

"Certainly," she replied. "We will get off at the next station."

Presently the train came to a stop on the roof of a block of buildings close to the river. Anymoon followed his guide on to the platform and accompanied her into a lift adjoining the waiting-room. She stopped it, by pressing a button, half-way in its descent. Opening the gate, she led the way down a long corridor, whilst he trod closely on her heels. Together they made their way through two wide swing-doors at the end of the passage.

They entered a large apartment with a row of lofty windows overlooking one of the quadrangles that Anymoon had seen from the train. Glancing outside, he saw that there was a smooth, well-kept grass-plot, intersected by flagged pathways, but no vestige of a shrub or a flower. At the same instant he heard the tinkle of merry laughter, and suddenly became conscious

that he was in a room full of people. Turning eagerly, he gazed around.

A long row of couches was ranged along the farther wall like the beds in a hospital ward. They seemed to be comfortable couches, unlike any he had yet seen in this Pythagorean era, piled with soft cushions, and upon each a female form was reclining. Anymoon paused with a start, for these ladies were clad in a single white garment, and their charms were of the character that is euphemistically termed opulent.

It was obvious that they were happy, for although they did not talk with one another they laughed immoderately and for no apparent reason, and some of them crooned curious little tunes. Beside each couch stood a small table with a large tray of sweetmeats and flasks of pink and yellow syrups. The plump ladies on the beds kept on popping goodies into their mouths incessantly, sipping from large crystal beakers now and then, chuckling to themselves all the while. They resembled contented children, waiting for nurse to come and dress them.

Their long hair, brown or black for the most part, flowed upon their shoulders, and they had an odd little trick of gathering a broad strand in their fingers and pressing it lovingly against their cheeks. From the tip of their fat snub noses a pair of compasses might have described a complete circle around the outline of their faces—sallow, seamless, vacant faces, like that of the toy-shop waxen doll without its hectic colouring. Their large roving eyes, as elusive as those of a puppy at play, were dull and inexpressive. Apparently the worker who was acting as Anymoon's guide was very much attached to them, for she often walked up to the bedsides and fondled several. The creature who was being petted rubbed her head affectionately against the caressing hand with a cooing sound.

"Aren't they pretty?" said the worker to Anymoon, in a tone that was suggestive almost of enthusiasm.

Inveterate connoisseur of feminine loveliness, Anymoon

felt much the same as a child-hating bachelor who is called upon by a young mother to go into ecstasies over an infant in arms.

"Well, I've seen a beauty chorus in my young days that would have looked none the worse for a few of them," he answered evasively. "But, candidly, I don't think that Seymour Hicks or the manager of the Gaiety would have had much use for them."

"We are very fond of them," said the worker.

"They seem quite happy."

"It is their nature."

Anymoon gazed upon the denizens of the harem ruefully.

"To speak honestly, it doesn't appear to me that they are very intelligent."

"They have no intellect. . . . It is unnecessary."

"How is that?"

"It is enough for the female breeder to have a healthy organism."

"Then do the drones supply the intelligence?"

"No."

"You puzzle me."

"Two sexes, of course, are born into the world—male and female. . . . The male is always the drone, but the female is capable of being converted into two species—the worker, like myself, or the breeder, such as you see here. . . . The selection is accomplished by the method of nutrition during infancy. . . . The organism of the breeder is thus devoted to the purposes of generation . . . that of the worker develops the intellectual faculties."

"So it's merely a question of food?"

"Which is the paramount influence both in human existence and in the bee-hive. . . . The evolution of every form of life has principally been decided by food."

"Thus, in a million years or so you might evolve an octopus into a monkey by persuading it gradually to eat nuts and climb trees."

"We take no interest in biology," replied the blue-clad worker, stroking the head of one of the most matronly occupants of the beds.

Anymoon gazed dreamily at the corpulent creature, who purred and chuckled to herself as the affectionate hand busied itself among her tresses.

"So these are the breeders?"

"Yes," replied the worker volubly. "When it is necessary for one of them to bear a child, we——"

"Exactly," interrupted Anymoon, who was a modest man. "And how many babies do you allow to each?"

"That depends upon the physique of the patient. . . . Their generative period is between the age of twenty-one and thirty."

"And afterwards?"

"When we have need of them no longer they are put to death."

"My dear lady!" protested Anymoon, with a shudder of dismay.

The worker produced a small leather case from a capacious pocket. The lid flew open as she pressed the catch, disclosing a surgical instrument.

"I have here a metal tube containing a solution of pure hydrocyanic acid. I attach this rubber bulb and screw on a hypodermic needle, and I can kill this creature"—she caressed the rippling hair fondly while she was speaking—"in two minutes."

Anymoon gasped for breath, while the plump female on the couch rubbed her head against the worker's hand, laughing with glee.

"Do you mean to tell me that the State trusts you with that lethal weapon?"

"We all have them," replied the worker.

"And you use it?" roared the horrified Anymoon.

"When it is necessary."

"Shade of Crippen!" exclaimed Anymoon. "You're a race of homicidal maniacs."

The worker continued to stroke the long, abundant hair calmly.

"It is unnatural for the useless to survive."

"But don't these — hem — breeders object to be killed?"

"Of course they cry a little when they see the hypodermic syringe, for they have seen us operate on their companions, and they know what is coming. . . . Some of them make a fuss, for naturally they want to live since they are so happy. . . . But we have to kill them to make room for others."

"Why can't you do it in a more humane manner?"

"What does it matter? . . . We all have to die. . . . There is no reason why they shouldn't know what is going to happen a few minutes before they are put to death."

"Take me away from here," cried Anymoon, sick with horror. "Let me see the drones."

The worker pointed to the door.

"Follow that passage. . . . Anyone will show you. . . . I must stay here to give these creatures their food."

Without waiting to hear another word, Anymoon fled from the room in disgust.

VII

He rushed through long, interminable passages as fast as he could, eager to get away as far as possible from the dreadful chamber that he had just inspected. The corridors through which he sped were all wide and lofty, lighted by high windows looking on to broad quadrangles, and he realised that they were actually covered streets along which he might walk from one end of the city to the other. At last, when he had run perhaps for half a mile, he slackened speed, out of breath and weary. Taking off his hat, he mopped his over-heated brow, pondering over all the wonderful sights that he had seen during the past few hours. Presently another of the blue-robed workers came towards him, and he was

inspired at once with a fresh desire to continue his explorations.

"Show me the drones," he exclaimed, addressing the new-comer.

She glanced at him imperturbably, as though both he and his request were not in the least unconventional.

"Come with me," she answered, leading the way.

They entered a lift and, descending to the ground floor, proceeded along a piazza into one of the open quadrangles. The sun was shining in a sky filled with fleecy clouds, and the shadows chased one another across the smooth green lawn. A troupe of active figures, dressed in short white tunics, with bare legs and long flaxen locks, was scampering over the grass, shouting with deep-chested laughter, in frantic pursuit of a large india-rubber ball. Now one of them would hurl it at a companion, and then another would throw himself upon it, rolling over and over gleefully. They wrestled and tumbled in good-natured play, turning somersaults or walking on their hands, as active as young kittens, never keeping still for a moment, laughing heartily all the time. Obviously, they felt the joy of life in every nerve and fibre.

"And so these are the drones?" said Anymoon.

The worker inclined her head.

"They seem jovial fellows."

"They are."

"And hearty too."

"They have to be strong and healthy. . . . That is why they are always taking exercise."

"What! all the day?"

"Except when they are eating or sleeping. . . . But here are some more of them at their meal. . . . Come and see."

She led the way to the northern side of the quadrangle, where a dozen of the drones were sitting around a table in the sun. Every one of them was stalwart and shapely, clean of limb and obviously in perfect condition. Their big bare legs were pink and muscular. All had handsome fresh-coloured features, with bright merry eyes, and even

when they were not roaring with laughter their lips were parted in a smile, revealing strong white teeth. None of them seemed more than twenty, and, but for the lack of intelligence in their countenances, they resembled a group of athletes in a college quadrangle in pre-war days.

They were eating voraciously and with evident enjoyment. A dish of honey stood before each, into which they were dipping huge slices of bread or ladling it abundantly over large soup-plates filled with rice or porridge. Some had already finished the first course and were attacking smoking dishes of vegetables or consuming bowls full of salad. They drank from large tankards, smacking their lips noisily after every draught and heaving deep sighs of satisfaction. Although they never spoke an articulate word, their laughter rang out unceasingly. A patient worker was waiting upon them untiringly, changing their plates, and wiping their slobbering mouths with a serviette.

"It is necessary to give them plenty of food," observed Anymoon's guide.

"What are they drinking?"

"A wine that we make for them from sugar-cane."

"Is it intoxicating?"

"Very."

The worker pointed to several robust figures stretched at full length on the grass, snoring stertorously.

"They are all drunk."

"Doesn't it do them a great deal of harm?"

"There is not time. . . . Their period of adolescence only lasts one summer."

"How old are they?"

"Twenty-two."

"And next year?"

"They will all be dead."

Although Anymoon was becoming inured to scenes of horror, a shudder passed through his frame.

"I suppose you kill them?" he exclaimed wrathfully.

The worker nodded.

"Do all of you carry a hypodermic syringe?"

"Of course."

"And you are each allowed to use it indiscriminately?"

"We know when it is necessary."

Anymoon pondered for a moment.

"When I think of some of my contemporaries, by Jove," he cried, after a pause, "how I envy your opportunities!"

"We have a fresh set of drones every year," observed the worker.

"I understand," replied Anymoon grimly, "you rear them with care. . . . They have one short hour of usefulness . . . and then death."

"What more can life bestow?" said the worker.

"Mrs. Rhyle's ideal has been achieved," soliloquised Anymoon. "Man has become of no more account than a drone in a bee-hive."

It seemed clear to him how this strange evolution had been accomplished. At some period in the remote past the female organism had succeeded in dominating the male, and nature had followed the process to its logical conclusion. It was the apotheosis of organic discipline. And he wondered whether it would have been better for humanity had the alternative consummation become operative, and if, had the dogmas of Cohen prevailed, the consequent struggle for existence would have accomplished a more beneficent selection. With a weary sigh he gave up the problem in despair.

"Tell me something about the workers," he remarked, turning abruptly to his guide.

"What do you want to know?"

"How long do you live?"

"We all die before we are thirty."

"Do they hypodermic you?" inquired Anymoon cynically.

"We die of exhaustion."

"In other words, you wear yourselves into your graves?"

"Yes."

"What's the good of it all?"

"It is natural."

"And you are really happy?"

"Everyone is happy who can work."

"It seems to me, my friend," observed Anymoon, after a thoughtful pause, "that the worst-paid worker in my day was a pampered aristocrat compared with poor slaves like you."

"But we are all equal," answered the worker.

"The fox in the trap!" shouted Anymoon in ecstasy. "You have all lost your tails. The fable explains the whole mystery of human nature."

A sudden thought occurred to him.

"Have you any religion?" he inquired awkwardly.

"What is that?"

"Well—ah—what becomes of you all when you are dead?"

"The bodies are taken to the manufactory."

"I didn't mean that," Anymoon interrupted hastily. "Don't tell me any more. . . . You are converted into leather and glycerine! . . . We knew all about that in the days of the Hun."

The drones had finished their meal, and leaping from their seats they scampered across the lawn with shouts of joy. A fresh crowd of them came hurrying to the table for food. It was apparent that they stood in awe of the worker in charge of them, although they were so superior in physique, for they waited demurely until she made a gesture to them to sit down, and they shrank back in awe if she chanced to menace any of them.

"Surely the drones are stronger than the workers?" Anymoon asked his guide.

"I don't know."

"Do they always obey you?"

"Of course."

"And they never attack you?"

The worker shook her head.

"It is not their nature."

"But you are in a large majority," said Anymoon grudgingly.

"About forty to one. . . . But that is not the reason. . . . They don't know how to revolt."

Without a word of farewell she walked away unceremoniously towards the central archway, leading into one of the wings of the quadrangle.

"Where are you going?" Anymoon called after her.

"To one of the nurseries," she answered, without troubling to look round. "You can come with me if you like."

"Shall I see any of the children?" inquired Anymoon, hurrying after her.

"Certainly."

"Then I'll come. . . . I want to have a look at your young."

VIII

They walked together beneath the piazza, which, as usual, ran along the base of the four wings of the great quadrangle.

"There doesn't seem to be an open road in the whole city," said Anymoon.

"No . . . as you observe, it is composed entirely of large squares."

"Oddly enough, it reminds me of the combs of a beehive."

"Probably that suggested the model originally."

"You are a strange people," said Anymoon, after a pause.

"We are free and equal."

"I'll be hanged if you are," retorted Anymoon. "You are the slaves of the State."

"That, of course, is the result of equality. . . . It is better that all should serve the State than that one part of the community should serve the other part."

"I don't agree. . . . The law of Equivalent Compensation should be capable of making such inequalities tolerable . . . if it is interpreted intelligently."

"We only have to consider that law in connection with the drones and the breeders."

"Meaning those who re-create," responded Anymoon thoughtfully. "We had a similar class, but in our case their use was to preserve the art and beauty and culture of the world. . . . We allowed them to become hated and despised because they did not work with their hands. . . . The law of Equivalent Compensation took no cognisance of them."

"How foolish of you. . . . We do not begrudge the drones their leisure, because they give us something in return."

One of the automatic lifts took them to an upper story. Leading the way down a corridor, the worker opened a door and ushered Anymoon into a lofty room. It resembled in every respect the dormitory containing the mothers of the race. Along one side of it ran a long row of cots, and upon each a newly-born infant was slumbering peacefully.

"These are some of the children," said the worker.

They were fat, rosy babies, with a clear skin and firm, waxen flesh. Their sleep was the calm, motionless sleep of healthy infancy.

"Why have you taken them from their mothers?" exclaimed the scandalised Anymoon.

"Because it is natural for them to be alone."

"But don't they fret?"

"Only the sickly ones, and, of course, they are destroyed."

Anymoon turned upon his guide with an expression of fury.

"Don't do anything of that sort in my presence," he thundered, "or I won't answer for the consequences."

The blue-clad being surveyed Anymoon calmly through her spectacles.

"In this room they are all healthy females. . . . We shall rear them all."

Anymoon was interested.

"Workers or breeders?"

"Half and half."

"How on earth, my friend, do you differentiate?"

The worker took a large dish from a table at the foot of one of the cots. It contained a mass of firm, claret-coloured jelly.

"Those who are fed on this will become productive females. . . . We give the ordinary food to those we wish to be workers."

"Amazing!" cried Anymoon.

"It is natural. . . . A similar process takes place in the bee-hive."

"But what about the drones?"

"They, of course, are of another sex."

"I should like to see some of the drone babies."

"Then come into the next room."

A solid piece of furniture, about the height of a dining-table, with a flat top of plate glass, not unlike a cabinet in a museum, stood in the centre of the apartment, and, as Anymoon peered down into it from above, he perceived to his astonishment that the cabinet contained a row of cots, in every one of which a placid baby was sleeping.

"These are the drones," announced the worker.

"Each in its cell like larvæ," observed Anymoon cynically.

"They are brought to a room like this as soon as they are born," replied the other.

Anymoon gazed with interest upon the sleeping infants beneath the glass. They were attractive babies, bigger and more chubby than those in the previous ward, dressed in white linen night-dresses, open wide at the neck, revealing their plump chests. Their arms, too, were bare half-way up the elbow, as if to show their fat, dimpled flesh.

"They are fine children," remarked the worker.

"Very, I should imagine," answered Anymoon; "though I am not much of a judge."

"They are as sound as a bell," she added.

"I suppose that this is a sort of incubator?" said Anymoon, placing his hand on the glass cover.

"We don't call it by that name," she replied.

"Poor little mites," cried the tender-hearted Anymoon. "And you are sure that they don't miss their mothers?"

"No, but it would not matter if they did."

"You have about as much humanity, my friend, as a rattlesnake," he retorted.

One of the babies opened its eyes and, moving its head fretfully on the pillow, became red in the face and began to cry. The sound, beneath the thick sheet of glass, was scarcely audible.

"It is seldom that they do that," observed the worker calmly.

"Aren't you going to try to stop it?" inquired Anymoon in surprise.

"Oh no."

"Then I presume that such a thing as convulsions is unknown?"

"It would be a waste of time to open the case to take it out. . . . I don't suppose it knows that it is crying."

Anymoon gave a contemptuous sniff.

"I should recommend fresh air, my good lady. . . . They must all of them be half stifled in that incubator."

The worker made no response. Walking from end to end of the long cabinet, with her nose almost touching the glass top, she appeared to be counting the number of babies inside.

"How many are there?" demanded Anymoon, at length.

"Twenty-six. . . . It is only half full."

"I presume that fewer drones are born than the other kind?"

"No, just about the same."

"But you have told me that the proportion of drones is only one in forty."

"Yes, because we destroy all we don't want."

"Inhuman female!" bellowed Anymoon.

"I will show you," she replied tranquilly.

She turned a small tap as she spoke. Rigid with horror, Anymoon stared at the slumbering babies below

the sheet of glass. The one immediately underneath, a robust child with a flush of pink in its cheek, stirred slightly in its sleep, and raising a tiny hand clutched feebly at its dimpled chin. At the same instant the colour faded from its face and, as an ashen pallor succeeded, its eyes opened slowly in a dull, leaden stare. The one next to it gave a tired yawn and then lay still. Trembling and inarticulate, Anymoon glanced up and down the long cabinet. All the babies were lying grey and motionless.

"It is over now," observed the worker carelessly.

"They are dead!" he groaned.

"Yes," she answered placidly; "they don't live long in the lethal chamber."

Anymoon staggered towards her, with murder in his heart. Clutching her by the shoulder he raised his fist to fell her to the ground, but at the touch of her flaccid frame, suggestive of all that appertained to life-in-death and remorselessness, his passion vanished and his arms fell helplessly to his side. It seemed useless to challenge the ethics of these creatures of another world. Each of them seemed utterly irresponsible, holding in trust for nature the power of life and death like the workers in a hive.

"Let me show you some of the older children," remarked his guide, oblivious, apparently, of his late exhibition of anger. "The drones and the females are brought up together until they reach the age of puberty. . . . There are two or three sickly ones in the next room. . . . I will show you how I use my hypodermic needle."

Turning his back upon her, Anymoon stalked indignantly from the room. Yet, at the same time he was conscious that it was absurd to feel any resentment. The new race of mankind was obliged to act in accordance with its instinct, and after all its standard of humanity, even judged from a twentieth-century point of view, was infinitely higher than it had ever been before. Not only had it eradicated disease almost entirely, but it dispensed equal and relentless justice among all human beings. The law of Equivalent Compensation adjusted

the obligations of drones and workers with almost mathematical impartiality. And except for the poignant moments when the fear of death struck terror into their hearts, and such moments must always be inseparable from human life until immortality was achieved, they were all supremely happy. Never in the history of the world had a political system been as impartial and as automatic and as benevolent. Every one of the great social reformers of the past, from Herr Marx down to Mr. Webb, would have regarded those hive-dwellers with admiration. At least, Anymoon knew that they must have done so, unless they were utterly disloyal to their tenets. Precedent had broadened down to precedent and bed-rock had been reached at last. The socialistic theory had reached its logical conclusion. The individual was absolutely subservient to the State.

Musing thus, he marched on interminably from corridor to corridor, traversing miles of the vast city in his wanderings. It was all the same—quadrangle succeeding quadrangle—and he was aware that every town in the land was of like construction. At last, as he paused before a wide, open window, overlooking one of the great squares, the sound of a mighty wailing struck upon his ears. It was the cry of human creatures in an agony of fear. Clambering up into the casement he stood in the stone balcony outside, and gazed down into the quadrangle.

A crowd of stalwart drones, with their long fair hair streaming in the breeze, was fleeing in terror across the smooth green lawn, pursued by one of the black-capped workers. And as he surveyed the scene in wonder one of the great fellows dropped upon his knees with a piercing shriek, grovelling in anguish upon the ground. For a moment he knelt there with his clasped hands upraised piteously, and then the worker was upon him. Her arm was uplifted, and Anymoon could see that she held the hypodermic syringe in her fingers. Steadying the drone by the shoulder she bent over him, pressing the needle deeply into his neck. Then, as she relaxed

her hold, he sank limply upon the lawn and she rushed away in chase of the others.

One by one, with heart-rending cries, they all surrendered themselves to their executioner. The same swift death was meted out to each. None seemed capable of a struggle to resist fate. Not one of them attempted to escape when the grasp of the butcher fell upon him. And the worker, as though she found enjoyment in the slaughter, never paused for an instant in her task, hovering over each victim with implacable ferocity, dashing hither and thither as though inspired with a feverish lust to kill. In a little while the lawn was covered with the white-clad figures, some stark and stiff, the limbs of others still twitching convulsively in the brilliant sunlight.

Anymoon gazed upon the spectacle with awestruck fascination. Then a revulsion of feeling swept over him.

"There is no part or lot for me in this land," he said wildly. "I must put an end to it now."

And poising himself for a moment upon the parapet an irresistible force impelled him to hurl himself into space.

IX

After what had seemed an eternity of oblivion the light began to struggle into his eyes, and he realised that he was lying in bed. Raising himself feebly from his pillow, he endeavoured to look around.

"You must lie still," said a voice above him.

Glancing up, he saw that a nurse in uniform was bending over him.

"Where am I?" he gasped.

"In hospital."

"Then I have been ill?"

"Yes, very ill," answered the nurse gently; "but you are better now."

"So it was all a dream?" he cried, reality dawning upon him.

"I expect that you have had all sorts of dreams," said the nurse soothingly; "but they won't bother you any more."

He closed his eyes wearily, but a sense of infinite relief thrilled him through and through. The horrible new world in which he had been dwelling was the mere figment of a dream after all—the phantasmagoria of a ghastly nightmare during moments of delirium.

"Thank God I am not living in a bee-hive," he murmured.

A gentle hand stole into his own, while a familiar voice whispered in his ear:

"Hush, dear, it is bad for you to talk."

Opening his eyes again, he perceived that his wife was sitting by his bedside. He pressed her fingers fondly.

"How long have I been ill?" he demanded.

"More than a month," she replied, smoothing his brow. "You are getting better. . . . Try to go to sleep again now."

He was struggling to sit up once more.

"Have I been unconscious ever since the night of the rebellion?"

"Yes, dear; but you mustn't think about that yet."

Anymoon raised his head from his pillow mutinously.

"Tell me what has been the matter with me. . . . I shall feel worse if I do not know."

"You have had typhoid fever," she answered.

He strove to adjust his thoughts. He had been delirious for a month. What had happened in the interim?

"Am I still President?" he cried wildly.

She did not reply, stroking his forehead with her soft, cool hand.

"Has Mrs. Rhyle succeeded me?" he exclaimed, more loudly still.

"No, dear," she whispered gently.

Still he was unappeased.

"And Cohen? . . . What of him? . . . Surely they crushed his rebellion?"

"He has been very kind to us, dear," she answered reluctantly. "No one could have been more considerate. . . . He was very sorry that you were ill, and he gave orders that you should be brought to this hospital——"

"What are my affairs to him?" he interrupted angrily.

She made no response.

"Good God!" he shouted. "I know what you are keeping back from me. . . . While I have been ill that man has usurped my power."

He sank back exhausted upon the pillow, and while his wife was endeavouring to soothe him he passed into unconsciousness once more.

PART V

CHAOS

I

FOUR months had elapsed since the ex-President awoke to consciousness in a London hospital. Immediately the crisis was past his convalescence had been a rapid one, and in a few weeks, except for the inevitable loss of vigour, he was as well as ever. As soon as he was able to get about, strength quickly came back to him. By the end of October his health had been completely restored.

It was the middle of December, and the first heavy fall of snow had descended upon the metropolis. Anymoon was standing on the pavement in the Edgware Road outside the large tenement block in which he now resided, with a thick muffler round his neck and a shovel in his hand. The air was frosty and a thin raw mist lay upon the housetops. From time to time he paused in his task of clearing the sidewalk to stamp his feet vigorously and to beat his arms across his chest, cabman fashion, to keep out the cold. Presently a window in the fourth story was pushed open and the head of his wife appeared.

"You have forgotten your mittens again, dear," she said, throwing the articles in question down to him. "Put them on at once or you will be getting chilblains."

Dropping his shovel, Anymoon slipped his hands into the warm wool.

"Thank you, my dear," he called back cheerily. "It's a cold job and I'm not in the best of training."

"It's disgraceful that you should have to do it," she answered indignantly. "It's a despicable revenge."

Anymoon gazed along the street apprehensively.

"Hush, my dear," he replied, picking up his shovel; 'one of the Crimson Guards has just gone by. It is unfortunate that the snow is so thick and that I am fifty-three."

Mrs. Anymoon gave a contemptuous sniff.

"That vindictive little Jew," she began.

"Desist, my dear," he answered, resuming his attack upon the snow. "It is the habit of Oriental peoples to take it out of their political opponents when they get the chance. . . . How are the twins?"

"Asleep, thank goodness," she replied. "I'm just going out for their milk. . . . But whether I shall get any or not is another matter."

"Exactly. . . . One can hardly expect peace and plenty under the present régime. . . . If I ever see a beef-steak again I think that I shall faint with joy."

"There will be a famine before the winter is over," exclaimed Mrs. Anymoon. "I wish your bee-hive dream could have come true. Society would have been far more tolerable than it is now."

And she closed the window with a slam.

"Undoubtedly," muttered Anymoon to himself, and he began to declaim the concluding lines of the *Dunciad* as he shovelled away the snow.

He recited with vehemence, finishing the poem in a burst of declamation:

> "Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
> And universal darkness buries all."

Suddenly he looked up. A dirty, dishevelled little man with a red band round his arm, who carried a scythe-blade attached to a long pole, was standing beside him.

"You tread quietly, my friend," observed Anymoon genially.

"What's that tosh yer was saying to yerself?" demanded the Crimson Guard, with fierce suspicion.

"Poetry," answered Anymoon imperturbably. "Lines that have received the warmest praise from Dr. Johnson and——"

"Hold yer jaw and stow yer poetry or I'll begin on yer jolly sharp. . . . We don't want no poetry now. And no one ever did but the cursed buzwar."

"My good officer, some of the greatest poets have sprung from the people——"

"Stop it, I tell you, stop it," cried the Crimson Guard furiously, "or I'll begin on yer."

Anymoon fumbled for a moment in his waistcoat pocket, finally producing a long cigar.

"Have a Corona?" he remarked conciliatorily. "You'll find it an excellent weed."

The Crimson Guard, who a few years before had been well known at Scotland Yard and in several of His Majesty's jails, snatched the cigar from Anymoon's hands, bit a piece off the end of it and lighted it with a fusee.

"Got any more of 'em?" he demanded, after a few appreciative puffs.

"Just a few perhaps," said Anymoon, with a smile.

"Ow, indeed. S'pose yer brought the swag from St. James's Pallis? Well, I ain't been up to yer rooms yet, but I'm a-coming this arternoon. . . . An' just see yer get a box or two of them cigars ready for me or I'll start on yer pretty quick."

And after delivering his ultimatum the guardsman shouldered his scythe-blade and marched down the snow-covered street.

"A charming specimen of the latter-day Communist," soliloquised Anymoon, gazing after the decadent little wretch. "I feel that I get more reactionary every day I live. . . . What an ass I was to offer him a smoke! . . . And I knew what manner of man he was, too."

Presently he perceived that a young man with a shovel had issued from the next doorway to his own a little farther down the road.

"Hullo, Kenneth," he cried, with a whoop. "I was wondering when you were coming out to do your bit."

Darell advanced towards him with a lugubrious face. He was wearing a white sweater and a pair of riding breeches.

"One of those guardsmen has looted my place," he exclaimed. "I haven't a rag left but what I'm standing in. . . . He got into the bedroom while I was having a bath."

Anymoon regarded his late secretary admiringly.

"You're dressed for the part, my boy. . . . It brings back pleasant recollections of Alpine sports."

Darell glanced down with a smile at his breeches.

"Yes, these things have come in handy," he replied; "I'd forgotten I had 'em. Good Lord, it's nearly five years since I was astride a horse."

"I'll let you have a coat and waistcoat with pleasure," said Anymoon, "and you'd better come up for them this morning. One of those Crimson gentlemen is going to pay me a visit this afternoon."

"It's an appalling state of things," cried Darell gloomily, leaning on his shovel, "but thank goodness it can't last."

"Why not?"

"The Powers will have to intervene. They can't look on and see England torn to pieces by anarchy."

Anymoon laughed scornfully.

"The League of Nations, my son, resembles the policewoman. It is excellent where admonition is required, but not a hap'orth of good in a scrap."

Darell frowned darkly. His cheeks were glowing in the keen air and his strong clear-cut features were stern and menacing.

"Then we shall have to get out of this mess by ourselves."

"Now, you're talking. . . . But I should qualify your

expression somewhat if I were summing up the situation."

Darell's black eyes were turned upon Anymoon wistfully.

"It's exasperating to reflect that but for your illness this chaos would never have come. I could persuade none of them to deal with the situation resolutely. Hothersall was staunch, but he has no judgment."

A complacent smile stole over Anymoon's lips, and his eyes sparkled defiantly.

"Yes, I'd have bested Cohen as I've bested him before," he exclaimed, with a burst of egotism. "And I'll leg him down yet, Darell, before I've done. . . . I've learnt wisdom from my mistakes, my boy. It was those women that led me astray. We gave the people too much government, Darell. We crushed them beneath a bureaucracy. Anti-Socialists always prophesied that it would be so, and I strove to avoid it at the onset. I walked into the pit with my eyes open."

Darell smiled intolerantly.

"You couldn't help yourself, I'm afraid. A huge aristocracy of Government officials was an essential part of your system. That is Socialism. We're suffering now from reaction."

"Is there any news from Mrs. Rhyle?" demanded Anymoon abruptly.

"There was another wireless message from Germany last night. She exhorts the women of England to be strong and of a good courage."

Anymoon gave a derisive guffaw.

"They'll need to be, by Jove. . . . It's easy to preach courage when one is in no danger. But I'm glad she escaped. Cohen would have hanged her for certain if he'd caught her. It's what he'd like to do no doubt to you and me."

Darell's lips curled cynically.

"Probably he thinks it more artistic to humiliate us first. And possibly he believes that we shall be overwhelmed in a pogrom before long."

"Yes," answered Anymoon; "they're sure to start

murdering when they are tired of looting. But, speaking frankly, I haven't felt the slightest humiliation up to now. The life of a scavenger has its fascinations. One may find a text for a dozen sermons in a dustbin."

"It is emblematic certainly of the present state of society," retorted Darell.

"The occupation has done wonders for my muscles," continued Anymoon, "though honestly I must admit that I don't like snow. But come up to my rooms and I'll give you that coat and waistcoat, otherwise our Crimson friend may pinch them this afternoon; and I'll introduce you to the twins."

And whistling with a Mark Tapley hilarity, Anymoon led the way into the open doorway.

II

COHEN's victory over the Government troops four months previously had been as swift as it had been unexpected. On the night when the National Armoury was burnt to the ground, the members of Council had retired to rest in the belief that the rebellion had been crushed. In the morning they learnt to their dismay that the revolutionaries had won a decisive triumph.

The strategy of the insurgent leader, although neither honest nor orthodox, had the merit of success. Having detached two strong divisions from the bulk of his forces, Cohen had allowed his main army to be surrounded, whereupon he had requested an armistice with a view to arranging terms of surrender. Wholly unsuspicious of treachery, the Government general had immediately complied, and the two commanders met at his headquarters as soon as it was daylight, each attended by a small staff. Expecting a bloodless victory, the forces of the National Service were quite unprepared. Most of them were sleeping in their bivouacs; their pickets were inadequate and

off their guard. In the midst of the parley the camp was suddenly attacked by the rebels on two sides, whilst Cohen and his followers, drawing pistols from their coats, shot down the general and his officers in cold blood. Panic fell upon the camp, and before discipline could be restored the insurgent army had stormed the position, driving the enemy before them in headlong flight.

The treacherous Jew, who escaped from his desperate adventure without a scratch, marched southward at once towards London, sending a few thousand men to Newcastle to demand the surrender of the Arsenal on the Tyne. At first, the munition men both at Armstrong's and at Woolwich, encouraged by the presence of the handful of bluejackets who had been landed to protect the works, prepared to offer a stout resistance. But again treachery had prevailed. Among the Government employees there were many of Cohen's sympathisers, aud these gradually undermined the loyalty of many of their fellows. Innumerable acts of incendiarism took place, which the sailors were unable to check, and finally, on the same night and evidently according to a prearranged plan, a great conflagration burst out in both of the Arsenals. In the midst of the confusion some of the rebel troops gained an entrance into the buildings, and before morning each had been almost completely devastated. After a gallant resistance, in which many of their number were killed, the seamen were compelled to take refuge on their ships, and although some of the destroyers opened fire upon the revolutionaries the guns merely helped to complete the work of destruction.

Cohen entered the metropolis in triumph. Now that Anymoon was lying on a bed of sickness no one seemed capable of offering resistance to the audacious rebel. Lachrymose and hysterical, Mrs. Rhyle proved a broken reed from the first, hurling truculent threats at the revolutionary leader at the onset, and then, when the cause was lost, making craven offers of compromise. Finally she fled from London in a motor-car, disguised as a policewoman, and after several hairbreadth escapes

succeeded in getting across the Channel in a fishing-boat. The impotence of their leaders reacted upon the National Council. For a short time Kenneth Darell made a brave attempt to rally the members, but, with the exception of Crannock and Hothersall, all of them one by one sought safety in flight. It was found impossible, moreover, to remobilise the National Service, for with the destruction of the Arsenals their *morale* had been utterly undermined and many of them went over to the enemy. In the end the two remaining councillors were compelled to send their secretary on a mission to Cohen, who had taken up his quarters at the Tower, offering to surrender the keys of St. James's Palace without further resistance, if he would promise that there should be no reprisals. Which suggestion the Jew had accepted with alacrity.

On the whole, considering his temperament, Cohen behaved with much magnanimity. He put no one to death and imprisoned very few. On the contrary, he seemed inclined to hold out the olive branch to everybody. A private room at one of the best hospitals was placed at the disposal of the sick Anymoon, while suitable apartments in the Edgware Road were assigned to his wife and children. Neither Hothersall nor Crannock was harmed in any way. But the new ruler, nevertheless, could not resist the temptation of indicating to his enemies that they were irretrievably "in the soup." So he converted the most eminent of them into road-sweepers and scavengers.

In other respects his methods were of a most drastic order. Both the Council and the Communes were abolished immediately, and Soviets of workmen were established all over the country, which were responsible for the carrying on both of government and trade. Every permanent official and manager of works was directly under the control of one of these bodies. At a single stroke the theory of discipline and efficiency was repudiated absolutely. The individual was no longer regarded as subservient to the community. The State existed for man and not man for the State.

Meanwhile, the British fleet, which Anymoon had summoned by cable to return to England, had been undergoing a more remarkable experience than perhaps any squadron had ever done before in the history of the Navy. On receipt of the order, Admiral Rouse had left the Sandwich Islands at once, and, after a stormy voyage round the Horn, had arrived at Las Palmas with empty bunkers in the early part of October. Here, as a matter of course, he had expected to be able to coal. To his intense surprise, however, he was informed that since the whole of the Canary Islands had just been purchased secretly from Spain by the Germans he could not have a single ton. When he retorted that he had sufficient fuel to reach Funchal he was told that Madeira also had been acquired by the Huns!

Since he could not appeal to his own Government, for he regarded the ascendancy of Cohen as a temporary anarchy, he dispatched a message of protest by wireless to the League of Nations. This estimable hierarchy was thunderstruck by the news. Without a moment's delay its plenipotentiaries put their heads together, during which process they concocted an ultimatum to the effect that no country could absorb part of another country either by barter or exchange unless it first obtained the permission of the National League, and that under no circumstances could Germany be allowed to retain such excellent submarine bases as Madeira and the Canaries. To which Potsdam replied, with all the courtesy of a diplomatic communiqué, that it was merely a matter of business, and in all matters of business it was a golden rule that other folks should mind their own.

The League of Peace was in a dilemma. If it repeated its edict, probably it would have to repudiate its first principles and go to war, and if it did not enforce its just demands the Huns would retain their pirates' nests. In either contingency principles would have to be abandoned. Finally—as the lesser evil—the hierarchy concluded that it was best to live a day at a time and keep the peace. They informed Admiral Rouse that Germany was unmis-

takably in the wrong, that they had done their best to demonstrate to Germany that she was in the wrong, but that unhappily Germany would not acknowledge that she was in the wrong. Consequently, there was no more to be said.

Without a moment's hesitation Admiral Rouse proceeded to demonstrate that the resources of the British naval officer are illimitable. Transferring the whole of his remaining stock of coal to his own flagship, he left the rest of the fleet at the Canaries and steamed away to England, arriving at Sheerness during the first week in November. Desirous of co-operating loyally with the existing Government, if he could be assured of its stability, he at once dispatched a marconigram to the Dictator offering to enter into negotiations. And Cohen replied by inviting him to come to St. James's Palace to discuss the situation.

Remembering the accident that had befallen the General of the National Service, the Admiral suggested that he would prefer to arbitrate with Cohen on board his own ship; but Cohen, who naturally judged every man from his own standpoint, was haunted by the suspicion that the Admiral might take advantage of his presence to perform an unpleasant ceremony at the yard-arm. So things had remained at a deadlock. To the great joy of Germany, the bulk of the British fleet had to stay in the harbour of Las Palmas with empty bunkers, while the flagship of Admiral Rouse and the four remaining destroyers were anchored in the Medway, coalless, it is true, but well-provisioned and with loyal crews; and those who knew what sea-power really meant realised that, as long as the battleships were there, Cohen could never be the real master of Great Britain.

III

BEFORE the end of January the nation was beginning to reap the fruits of Cohen's government by *laisser-faire* principles, and famine was staring the people in the face. Not only had the winter been abnormally severe, but the previous harvest had been a disappointing one. The rule of the Soviets had discouraged production all over the country, every man being taught to believe that he might do whatever was right in his own eyes. In many industries work was brought to a standstill. There was a great shortage of coal, with a consequent failure of transport.

Autocratic by disposition in spite of his dogmas, Cohen began to rate the various Soviets vehemently, declaring with scorn that the Commonwealth was doomed unless the citizens were loyal. He pointed out that although he did not expect them to work as hard as they could, he had not anticipated that they would try to work as little as possible. The Soviets replied to him that it was inevitable that there should be a reaction after the slave-driving domination of the Socialists. Further than this, they intimated that it was one of the first principles of their creed that the Trade Unions should decide what was to be the output of work; that until now the workers had not experienced any shortage; and that if there was to be a shortage they would take care that the other classes of the community should be the only victims.

It was one of the most cherished convictions of the rank and file that none but the manual labourers were of any account. Everyone else was a pariah, who might be robbed and maltreated at their pleasure. Cohen himself had always preached the gospel of hatred against the officials, the managers, and the old bourgeoisie; and his disciples in consequence felt infinite disappointment that the late system of share and share alike had left these

people with so little that was worth taking. Still, the ex-jail-birds set a brave example in the way of pillage, and there were few persons who had anything to lose who did not suffer from domiciliary visits.

Hitherto, since private property would not suffice, the Cohenites had escaped privation by helping themselves as they pleased from the national storehouse. Whenever a gang or an individual wanted provisions or clothes, the articles were commandeered at once from one of the Government shops, or, if more convenient, they were stolen from a neighbour. In consequence of the general dislocation of trade, time hung heavily upon most, and it was a recreation to take part in these predatory expeditions. Mankind had been accustomed for so many years to appropriating other people's property under the divine right of Socialism that pilfering no longer was regarded as a sin.

Thus, when actual want at last began to be felt, the reduced standard of morality and the antipathy of the people towards the erstwhile ruling classes combined to create a situation of real menace to the existence of society. The Crimson Guards, enrolled by Cohen as a substitute both for the old Police and National Service, were rather an incentive than a deterrent to crime. The majority of them were ex-convicts or low-class foreigners, capable of any atrocity. They regarded their fellow-men as their natural prey, seizing every opportunity to levy blackmail.

As usual, the bulk of the nation was lethargic. Although in their heart of hearts they looked with disfavour upon looting, few ventured to incur the odium of the extremists by condemning it openly. The people had enrolled themselves beneath the banner of Cohen because he had promised them liberty, and since it had seemed to them that any condition would be better than the uncompromising tyranny of State Socialism with its herd of "Egyptians." But now, as the winter progressed and the necessaries of life became scarcer and dearer, it began to dawn upon all save the criminal classes that the

tyranny of anarchy was more unpleasant and infinitely more perilous than anything they had yet experienced.

Still, so far, crime for the most part had been directed against property. There had been little danger to life and limb. Occasionally some unpopular manager or martinet official was found in a deserted street or a lonely field with his throat cut or his brains battered in, but these were sporadic occurrences. As yet, the villains of the piece had not warmed to their work.

The case of Mrs. Stillingham, the lady novelist,—the first of many similar ones,—at last demonstrated to the nation that a reign of terror had commenced. This energetic woman, indignant that not a single writer had found a place on any of the Soviets, took it into her head to pay a visit to St. James's Palace to expostulate with Cohen. After some little delay she was informed that he would see her, for he made a point of being accessible to all, and she was conducted to his private apartment. The "Guard Room," through which she passed upon reaching the top of the wide staircase, was full of Crimson Guards and reeking with their tobacco, and the "Armoury Room" adjoining was occupied by a chattering crowd of secretaries and typewriters. Cohen was sitting alone in the "Old Presence Chamber" before a large table littered with correspondence.

"I want brains," he answered, when she told him the nature of her mission. "Name any man with brains, and let me know his credentials, and I will gladly make use of him."

"Mr. Gossamer, for instance, would be invaluable for propaganda," she replied, with a disdainful toss of her peroxide coiffure.

"Bah," ejaculated Cohen, "wind-bags are no use to me. . . . I have talkers enough to go round three times over. . . . People of knowledge are what I need. . . . Show me a financier, or a capable actuary, or a loyal railwayman. . . . Those are the fellows I require."

"One does not expect a writer to be a man or a woman of business——" retorted Mrs. Stillingham.

"Then I have no use for them," interrupted Cohen. "If that is all you have to say to me, good morning."

"But surely, sir, we have our rights——"

"You have no rights at all. . . . It is only the workmen who have rights, and those, like myself, who are the brains of their organisation."

Mrs. Stillingham rose indignantly, glaring at the Dictator with eyes of scorn.

"Then let me tell you, sir, that you are steering straight for disaster. . . . Chaos yawns——"

Cohen rang his bell violently, and a secretary appeared smoking a cigarette.

"Show this woman outside," he thundered, "and see that she never comes back again."

Amidst the jeers of the unsavoury entourage the unfortunate lady was hustled through the ante-room, and pushed unceremoniously into the snow-covered street. A group of loafers assembled around the gateway of the Palace hailed her humiliation with shouts of laughter. Thoroughly cowed, she hastened away through St. James's Park. But the malice of the spectators had been awakened.

"Buzwar!" rose the cry.

"To hell with the toffs!" was bawled from every side.

A crowd started in pursuit of her, yelling in execration and finally closing around, jostling her vindictively. With blazing eyes, she turned at last upon her tormentors.

"Canaille!" she shrieked, recalling to mind how the old noblesse behaved when brought to bay by the Jacobins.

"Can you what?" vociferated the mob, mocking her.

She was struggling along the snow-clad Mall, quickening her speed in vain endeavour to escape from her pursuers, when a shout arose of "Strip her!" And in an instant the cry had swelled into a tumultuous chorus of "Off with the old cat's clothes!" With a ribald curse, a man thrust out a hand and switched off her toque, a bunch of hair coming away with it. As she

flung her hands to her dishevelled head-dress with a cry of dismay, the mob gave a howl of derision.

They hurled themselves upon her like the waves beat upon a rock that is surrounded by an angry sea, snatching at her dress, clawing at her with ferocity. For a moment she stood erect, battling against them hysterically, and then she was swept off her feet, disappearing with a shriek of despair in the midst of the human whirlpool. A wild shout of triumph went up from the crowd. Those nearest flung themselves upon their knees, tearing her garments into shreds, whilst those in the rear pressed forward fiercely in their struggles to take part in the despoilment. In a few moments she had been stripped naked and the miscreants were rolling her bare body in the snow.

At length they gave her a respite, standing around in a circle gloating over her naked form, uttering scornful gibes as she lay exhausted on the ground. Presently, when their curiosity was appeased, they raised her up and, in spite of her piteous entreaties that they would leave her there to die, they made her walk before them down the avenue, while they followed with shouts and laughter, driving her out into the crowded streets and calling on every passer-by to make a mockery of her.

IV

There was a great increase in drunkenness. Every one of the cellars belonging to the Government, where all the wine had been stored when it was confiscated from private owners, was looted by the mob in turn. In the orgies that always accompanied these depredations hundreds drank until they lay senseless upon the ground. Others, who merely became tipsy, conveyed scores of bottles to their homes in baskets or in hand-carts for future carousals. The number of private distilleries,

illicit no longer since the Government had neither the power nor the inclination to suppress them, was multiplied a thousandfold. The Crimson Guards appeared to live in a state of chronic intoxication.

The system of ration-tickets, introduced by the previous administration, which in combination with the inevitable officialdom had been the prime cause of its downfall, was abolished entirely. Notes and specie again became the medium of exchange, and the Government banks were opened once more. In lieu of wages, the supposed profits of the various industries were divided amongst the workmen, and the nation began for a second time to live upon its capital. But the criminal classes were not content to participate in the spoils equally. Raids upon the banks were as frequent as the attacks upon the wine-stores, and in a little while much of the gold and silver had been looted. The Government met the deficit by the issue of paper credit.

After the outrage upon Mrs. Stillingham assaults upon gentlewomen became much more frequent, since it was apparent that they could be committed with impunity. No well-dressed woman dared to appear in a public street. Even the working-girls were in the habit of going about in bands, for if alone or even in couples some of the Crimson Guards at any moment might make a brutal attack upon them. The inequality of the two sexes was demonstrated conclusively in a most lamentable manner.

Fearful for the safety of his wife and children, Anymoon took the first opportunity of sending them to France. There was little difficulty in arranging their escape. Almost every day airmen made the flight across the Channel carrying refugees abroad, and although Cohen published a manifesto threatening awful penalties against those who participated in this traffic, he was powerless to suppress it. Mrs. Anymoon was anxious that Grace Dalrymple should accompany her, but Grace, who was unwilling to leave England as long as her fiancé remained, preferred to join Cyril and Betty in Lancashire,

which hitherto had been far more tranquil than the Home Counties.

A few days after Mrs. Anymoon's escape, as Father Oldfield was walking through the streets of Westminster he found himself in the midst of a small crowd. Half a dozen Crimson Guards were hurrying along with a couple of pretty young women, and a few disreputable youths were following after uttering ribald gibes. The girls, who were obviously of gentle birth, their eyes wild with terror, were struggling frantically with their captors and imploring them to let them go. The priest stepped into the roadway, holding up his hand peremptorily.

"What is the meaning of this cruelty?" he demanded in a ringing voice.

The leader of the Guards paused with an angry scowl. Then, as he perceived that he had to deal with a frail old man, he gave a derisive laugh.

"This is me little wife," he hiccupped, clutching one of the shrinking girls by the wrist. "I'm taking 'er 'ome."

The girl flung herself on her knees before Father Oldfield, holding out her clasped hands with a piteous cry.

"Oh, sir, I do not know these men," she exclaimed in a cultured voice. "Tell them to let us go."

The priest folded his arms majestically.

"Release these ladies at once," he thundered.

The Crimson Guardsman thrust out his chin with a tipsy leer.

"'Oo says so?" he retorted.

"I say so, in the name of God Almighty," cried Father Oldfield. "Obey me at once."

The fellow reeled forward, striking the priest on the mouth with the back of his hand.

"That's one for God Almighty," he snarled savagely. "And there's another for your blasted self."

And he felled the old man to the ground.

With a raucous cheer the Crimson Guards swept on, pushing the weeping girls in front of them and followed

by the attendant loafers. Father Oldfield, a little stream of blood trickling from his lip, rose upon his knees, and gazed in horror down the street after them. As soon as he had recovered from the shock of the blow he staggered to his feet and hastened in pursuit. His sole thought was to prevent a great crime.

The girl who had solicited his help was apparently now too terrified to move, and two of her captors, with their hands beneath her arms, were dragging her along. Her companion had stopped crying and was walking with head erect and fingers clenched. A hundred yards farther down the road the miscreants reached a three-storied house, which the Guardsmen used as their barracks. Two of them halted at the entrance, pushing back the clamorous crowd, while their companions hurried inside with their prisoners.

"Buzz off," cried the leader, thrusting at the loafers with his pike. "This is our catch. . . . Go and git some stuff of your own."

And following his comrades into the house he banged the door behind him. The key was turning in the lock when the priest, rushing up the steps, flung himself against the woodwork, hammering peremptorily and calling for admittance. A yell of derision arose from the despicable youths standing around. Once more Father Oldfield knocked and shouted. He was answered by a long despairing wailing from within, the agonised cry of women in the bitterest distress.

Turning, he faced the little crowd with flashing eyes.

"If you are men," he cried, "help me to break down this door."

A roar of laughter answered him, drowning for a moment the piteous cries from inside.

The mob began to increase in numbers. The figure of the gesticulating priest, standing high above the roadway, and the mocking cheers of those who listened to his impassioned words, attracted spectators from far and near. Hearing the tumult, little groups of Crimson Guards came reeling down the streets. And all the time

Father Oldfield continued to implore the people to go to the succour of the poor girls.

"I cannot appeal to you as Christians," he exclaimed passionately, "for there is no love of God in your hearts. . . . But I appeal to you as human beings, in the hope that you are not wild beasts. I appeal to you as fathers and as brothers, having daughters and sisters, who are sweet and good, yourselves."

A Crimson Guard pushed his way through the throng. Halting at the foot of the steps, he scowled up at the priest.

"What's the trouble?" he shouted. "Who are you calling wild beasts?"

Father Oldfield's index finger shot out towards the man accusatorily and then swept back in the direction of the house behind.

"Every man among you is a beast who does not help me to break through into this den of abomination," he thundered. "In the name of humanity, I call upon you all."

The Crimson Guard uttered a torrent of oaths.

"Let me mates a-be," he answered, "and keep a civil tongue in your head or I'll knock it off."

The denunciatory finger shot out again.

"Infamous wretch," roared the angry priest, "it is you and your villainous comrades who are the curse of the land. . . . I denounce you all before Almighty God!"

Other guardsmen pressed forward sputtering with rage, while the mob swayed with excitement to see their authority defied.

"Good old crow," shouted a man on the outskirts of the crowd. "Give 'em socks!"

Standing on the topmost step, Father Oldfield raised both hands towards heaven.

"For the last time I appeal to your sense of right and wrong," he said. "Are you for Christ or Satan?"

One of the Crimson Guards rushed forth with lowered pike.

"Go to hell," he screamed, jabbing at the priest with all his strength.

They swarmed up the steps, a dozen of them, with a clamour of rage, thrusting at the old man with their gleaming blades. . . . The first scythe had torn a gaping wound in his cheek, another sank deep into his chest. With a choking cry his hands dropped helplessly to his sides.

"*In te, Domine, speravi,*" he murmured, and he fell down headlong upon the pavement.

The Crimson Guards stabbed him through and through as he lay prostrate at their feet, slaking their fury upon the blood-stained corpse, while the ribald crowd growled forth exultations at the murder. And all the while the muffled shrieks of the two girls could be heard still.

V

On the following morning Cohen was sitting in his private apartment with his two faithful adherents, Larcey and Kinreck, both of whom had been rewarded for their services by high commissions in the Crimson Guards.

"The priest had been asking for it for a long time," exclaimed the Dictator, striking his fist upon the table. "He only got what he deserved."

Larcey murmured assent, but Kinreck shook his mop of hair vigorously.

"Superstition dies hard," he said, with emphasis. "There's millions of religious people still, and they'll deem him a martyr. We'll have every denomination arrayed secretly against us."

Cohen combed his beard with his claw-like fingers.

"I don't fear them," he answered. "After all, religion is only a bourgeois affair. . . . This is a class war, my friend."

Larcey chuckled exultantly.

"And don't forget it," he muttered. "It's a class war, and we've got to see the thing through sooner or later."

"There were plenty of pious poor people in the old days," replied Kinreck, still unconvinced.

Cohen thrust out a hand impetuously.

"I see you realise that class feeling still survives in spite of more than four years of futile Socialism. . . . The whole State is still honeycombed with caste . . . and the country will never be a safe place for the worker until everyone else has been swept away."

There was a cruel glitter in Larcey's dark eyes.

"Cohen's right, Kinreck," he observed. "Every one of the Anymoon gang of managers and officials belongs to a special class, and you'll find that the old bourgeoisie and the old ruling-classes will combine with them. . . . They'll be top dog in the end, and the workers 'll have to knuckle under, as has always happened, unless we take warning from the mistakes of the past."

"I don't see what you're driving at," said Kinreck, a flush on his hollow cheeks.

"Larcey means that three-fourths of the nation will have to put their heels on the necks of the other fourth," exclaimed Cohen.

"It's a tall order," answered Kinreck. "If you're going to banish the lot of them, there'll be fine nests of conspiracy going on amongst 'em in foreign countries. . . . Happen they'll egg on the Germans to invade us."

"I don't intend to banish them," said Cohen, with a grim smile.

"Oh, I'm with you up to a point," answered Kinreck. "I'd punish all treachery vigorously. . . . We'll have to hang a few scores, or maybe hundreds, afore we've finished this job. But after that my policy would be conciliation. . . . I'd win all classes over to our side. . . . There's a new generation springing up, and the bourgeoisie 'll have forgotten all their traditions within twenty years."

Cohen shook his head.

"Not in fifty. It's bred in the bone of them. . . . And even granting your twenty years, what d'you think's

going to happen before then? . . . Why, we'll be all swept away in a counter-revolution."

"Look what's happening now in Lancashire and the west," added Larcey impressively.

"No," continued Cohen. "This is a class war, and I'll fight it to the end. . . . If we're to make the country safe for democracy, democrats will have to be the only folk in it."

Kinreck laughed, but the laugh rang hollow.

"So, as you're not going to banish the rest, I conclude you mean to exterminate them," he observed cynically.

Larcey was biting his thin, cruel lips savagely.

"And why not?" he exclaimed. "It's either us or them. . . . And I'd rather it was them."

"It's got to come to that sooner or later," said Cohen, plucking at his beard. "In the French Revolution they blotted out their aristocracy, and it has never raised its head since."

"We shall have to annihilate all our enemies just the same."

"Like Father Oldfield," said Kinreck, with a shudder.

"Aye," murmured Cohen. "The people will take the law into their own hands often enough, but they'll want a lead from the Government. . . . I intend to strike down all that stand in my way if I have to hang a million of them."

"You'll be getting busy," replied Kinreck nervously.

"I shall strike without mercy," continued the Jew, banging his fist on the table. "To-morrow it will be that fellow Sternroyd, who is up to the eyes in the conspiracy against us. . . . Next day it will be Anymoon himself. . . . I shall proclaim all the members of the old National Council!"

"It looks like being a serious revolt in the north," said Larcey gloomily. "That scoundrel Hothersall is still a power in Lancashire. . . . And we had our stronghold there at the beginning."

"Naturally," answered Kinreck, with a sneer, "because

they couldn't stomach tyranny. . . . That's why they're rising against us now."

"D'you say that I'm a tyrant?" growled Cohen menacingly.

"You don't intend to be, no doubt," replied Kinreck stolidly; "but you drive the people instead of leaving them alone. It's part of your creed, and the best part, that a free nation should be governed as little as possible."

"We must have security first," retorted Cohen. "When we've erected a forest of gibbets and decorated them with the right folks it'll be time to slacken the reins."

"Yes, we've got to weed out our aristocrats first of all," cried Larcey. "A hundred thousand heads will have to fall ere we're safe."

Presently a woman secretary entered the room with a letter. Tearing it open eagerly, Cohen glanced at the contents. A fierce oath started from his lips.

"What's up?" inquired Larcey.

The Jew had sprung to his feet, his seamed and swarthy features livid with rage.

"Anymoon left London secretly last night and has joined the rebels at Taunton."

"Impossible!" said Larcey in dismay. "He has been watched all the time."

Cohen turned upon him furiously.

"Yes, and by your guardsmen. . . . See how they serve us! . . . Their loyalty fades away at the first test."

"There must have been treachery," groaned Larcey.

"Treachery! Of course there has been treachery. . . . Some of them must have been secret adherents and helped him to get away. . . . Darell has gone with him, a soldier like young Thring. . . . All the officers of the National Service will flock to their help unless we put them under lock and key. . . . You've got your lists. . . . Issue orders for the arrest of them all immediately."

Larcey strode to the door. He paused with his fingers on the handle.

"What of the navy?" he demanded.

Cohen waved him away impatiently.

"The navy can't move a yard," he answered. "They're not a scrap of good to Anymoon even if they're on his side."

"Why shouldn't they come over to us?" exclaimed Larcey.

Cohen uttered a contemptuous snarl.

"Go and ask them. . . . I've tried."

"You've not played your cards right, my friend. . . . How is it that a few men you could trust have never volunteered as seamen? . . . If you leaven the ships with a few of them, you might win over the lot. . . . Have you never heard of the Mutiny at the Nore?"

Cohen smiled sardonically.

"The only objection to your scheme is that Rouse won't allow a single soul on board. . . . When he wants anything, he sends an armed party on shore to fetch it. . . . And so far he seems to have got all he wants, curse him."

"It's a hopeless position," remarked Kinreck, with a sigh.

Cohen glanced angrily at his lieutenant.

"It may be stalemate as far as we and the navy are concerned, but I'll be hanged if they've got the whip hand of us, and they never will. . . . And as for the rebels, I'll crush them to powder. . . . It's a far cry from Taunton to Manchester, and long before they've joined hands I'll have smashed them each up in turn."

"If you strike now," said Larcey significantly.

"I mean to. . . . Look up your lists, and give the orders for the arrests at once. . . . It's our lives against theirs. . . . I don't intend to bite the ground before that pinchbeck Cromwell, Joseph Anymoon."

VI

Just as dawn was breaking on the next day two prisoners, with their hands bound behind their backs and their heads bared, were led out to die in the courtyard of Wellington Barracks. It was a bitter morning, a white frost upon the ground and a thin raw mist in the air. There was a difference in the demeanour of the condemned men. Sternroyd, the faithful henchman of Mrs. Rhyle, with his eyes closed and a ghastly face sunk upon his chest, was being dragged along between a couple of Crimson Guards, a mere wisp of humanity in a state of stupor. His companion, a veteran of many wars, who had lately commanded a brigade of the National Service troops, was treading like a king, his glowing cheeks unblanched, his white head unbowed.

Owing to the vanity of the captain of the Crimson Guards, their death was to be a merciful one. His company happened to possess a dozen service rifles with a few rounds of ammunition, and, proud of this rare distinction, he had determined to carry out a military execution *en règle*. A couple of posts had been sunk in the ground, and a firing-party was standing in readiness. The innovation appeared to gratify the rank and file just as much as a common or garden hanging, for they had slouched into the barrack square with their hands in their pockets and their pipes alight, eager to behold the spectacle.

The doomed men had reached the place where they were to die, and the captain of the Guards, with a red sash around his waist, strolled up, smoking a cigarette.

"Tie them quick," he growled impatiently. "You've been keeping us waiting for a quarter of an hour."

"It was this blasted little perisher," replied one of the men who were supporting Sternroyd. "He fought like a fury when we were fastening 'is 'ands."

Sternroyd's eyes opened—wide, agonised, beseeching eyes. His pale, effeminate features were distorted with terror. With a spasmodic effort he cast himself grovelling on to his knees.

"Mercy!" he gasped. "For God's sake, mercy! . . . I'll serve you as faithfully as a dog!"

The captain of the Crimson Guards aimed a savage kick at the head of the prostrate man, striking him heavily on the shoulder. He gave a low whine of pain.

"You should have thought of this afore yer turned traitor," muttered the guardsman.

"I can do no harm," wailed Sternroyd. "But there are scores of others who'll stab you in the back. . . . Spare my life, and I'll name them all."

The captain laughed in derision.

"So you said to the court-martial. . . . But we can catch traitors without your cursed 'elp. . . . Stow yer gab and look pleasant, or I'll have yer flogged before we put the daylight holes into yer."

Sternroyd flung himself face downward upon the gravel.

"For the love of Heaven, spare me," he groaned in anguish. "Use me as a spy. . . . I can help you, I will help you. . . . I'll work for you night and day."

With a gesture to his men the captain stepped back and lit another cigarette. They flung themselves upon the prostrate wretch, snatching him roughly from the ground. In another moment he was fastened to the stake and a bandage bound over his eyes. His body hung forward limply within the coils of rope, motionless and drooping. The guards advanced to bind the old officer to the post, but he waved them away.

"There is no need to tie me," he said sternly.

"Truss 'im up," snarled the captain; and perceiving that they were resolved, the soldier submitted.

But when they were going to cover his eyes he protested once more, and this time they did not persist.

"Let 'im see it all," shouted the captain; "it'll make it so much the worse for 'im."

There was a grim smile on the lips of the old officer as he listened, and he jerked up his chin proudly.

A moment later there came the sharp crackle of rifle shots, and the Crimson Guards, in eager curiosity, swarmed closely around the two lifeless bodies.

. . . . . .

The next morning David and Hodson were sitting underneath a shed in the station yard of their little village in the depths of Surrey, waiting for the trucks of coal that never arrived. The latter was reading the *National Daily Mail*, now a Cohenite organ, to his companion. His round, homely face was grave and careworn.

"In theory I've been a staunch Socialist for twenty years," he muttered, shaking his grey locks. "But if I'd dreamt that it'd run us into all this trouble I'll be hanged if I ever would have meddled with it."

"Well, there's more liberty at all events than Anymoon gave us," said David, with a contemptuous snort. "A chap can have a drink now when he fancies one."

"And what d'you say to all this cruel murder?" demanded Hodson, with reproachful eyes.

"Aye, that's the ruination of it all," replied David lugubriously. "Folks always overdo everything in these days. . . . I suppose that's Socialism."

"There ought to be a mean in things," said Hodson thoughtfully, "if we could only hit it."

A grim smile overspread David's crimson face.

"So far those who has tried have been shocking bad shots," he retorted.

Hodson slapped his palm upon his thigh.

"I'm off west by the first train that comes along. . . . Though I'm past military age, I'll strike a blow for the winning side."

David looked up quickly.

"Why d'yer think the Bolshies 'll get licked?" he demanded.

"Because bullies always are," replied Hodson.

"By Jingo, I'll come along with you," said David. "If

we get rid of Cohen the same as we did Anymoon, maybe this world 'll be a better place to live in."

"But you'll be fighting for Anymoon if you come with me," objected Hodson.

"Aye, that's true," replied David, with a grin, "but it'll not be the same Anymoon by a long chalk. . . . You learn wisdom by experience, and I reckon that's what this blessed country will have done if things ever get straight again."

And many a sturdy Briton, who held similar views, also journeyed west to join the counter-revolutionaries at Taunton.

. . . . . .

Chris and Jesse, the two ca' canny Lancashire moulders, also were beginning to be dismayed by the truculent methods of Cohen and his associates. Because of their lethargic attitude with regard to the output of work they had been promoted to the position of manager and foreman-fitter respectively by the local Soviet. One morning early in February they were confiding their apprehensions to one another as they sat in the manager's office at their foundry over a lunch of bread and cheese.

"I connot stomach this 'ere devilment tut t' women," observed Chris, with an angry scowl. "I've two lasses o' my own, thou knows."

"That's all reet," replied Jesse encouragingly. "Them Crimson Guards do most o' their marlocking among the gentle-folk."

"Nawe, I'll be hanged if they do," continued Chris, with a fierce oath. "One o' my wenches gets stopped in t' street whelly every neet. . . . If a lass is the pretty, leet-some sort, as looks well in her cloas, hoo scarcely dare put her nose out o' doors. . . . I'm fair sick o' sich foisty wark."

"What plagues me is this proscription, as they calls it," said Jesse gloomily. "A chap con go on the boose for a week, and when he comes back to his job if you so much as gloar at him he goes blethering about it to the Soviet. . . . It wouldna surprise me if I were to be

grassed ony day. . . . But you connot carry on a shop this road."

"One of them Crimson Guards followed my youngest lass all t' way to hoo's whome last week," resumed Chris menacingly. "I cottered him out pratty quick, I con tell you, and he were a crumper an' all. . . . I gave him a dab in t' chops he'll noan forget in a hurry."

"How it's all going to end I've no notion," said Jesse. "We'll all be clemmed to death whelly afore the spring."

"By th' hangment, I've made up my mind what to do!" cried Chris. "I'm for joining Tom Hothersall."

"Good Lorjus days!" exclaimed Jesse. "I were thinking of the very same thing mysen."

"Tom's going to carry this job through."

"Aye, lad, I allow he's a fair chance."

"Why, they dunnot dare to make a move again him! . . . He's getten a tidy army an' no mistake. . . . Folks is sick o' all this murdering wark."

"Well, there's nowt to hinder us," said Jesse. "Let's gang along to Manchester this very day. . . . I've had a bellyfull of these Bolshies."

VII

One morning, a day or two later, Admiral Rouse was pacing the quarter-deck of his flagship, which was lying in the Medway, in company with Thring, who had been his guest since the counter-revolution had broken out. They had been discussing the situation in all its bearings.

"Cohen's cooked his goose all right," remarked Thring. "The English people can never forgive a massacre. . . . From the days of 'Bloody Queen Mary' it has ruined every Government that has ever been implicated in such a thing."

"I'm not at all hopeful of his downfall," said the

Admiral dismally. "Since he's seen how things are going he has ordered a big lot of munitions from Germany."

"I wonder he didn't do that before."

"He tried, directly the Arsenal was burnt down; but the Huns didn't know which horse to back then. . . . Now they realise that he's their best friend."

Thring's proud lips curled with scorn.

"It's ignominious that the whole nation should be at the mercy of its riff-raff, led by a gang of aliens."

The Admiral stroked his pointed red beard and there was a snap in his blue eyes.

"It's still more ignominious to know that with a few tons of coal I could put an end to 'em in a week. . . . The little Hebrew knew what he was doing when he cleared all the stocks out of London."

A sentry gave a hail from a lower deck. A dinghy, rowed by a single oarsman, was approaching the battle-cruiser. Unshipping his blades, the occupant of the boat waved a white handkerchief vigorously. The Admiral walked over to the rails, raising his telescope.

"One of my secret intelligence people, I imagine," he observed carelessly.

Thring followed, slipping his pince-nez over his fierce, hooked nose.

"Upon my life," he exclaimed, after gazing at the dinghy intently for a moment or two, "I do believe it's Parker. . . . But I thought he was in Lancashire."

It was Parker, who, as soon as the stairway had been lowered for him and he had come aboard, requested an interview with the Admiral. A few minutes later he was standing on the quarter-deck with Rouse and Thring.

"I did go to Lancashire, sir," he answered, in response to the latter's inquiry. "They can get along all right there without me, and I knew I'd be more use if I came on here."

"Why, we are impotent," groaned Thring.

Parker shook his head decidedly.

"I rather think not, sir. . . . I've got an idea, and

so I have come to take the liberty of submitting it to the Admiral."

Rouse's keen blue eyes kindled.

"I can guess what it is, Parker," he answered. "I'm waiting for a few days to see whether the people in the west can get possession of some of the Welsh coal-fields. . . . If they don't I must make a move. . . . It's a desperate venture, marching through a hostile country with a mere handful." He gave a grim chuckle. "It'll solve the problem whether six hundred trained men can hold their own against a rabble nation."

Parker smiled grimly.

"I think there is no doubt, sir, that you can fight your way through either to Taunton or to Manchester," he answered respectfully. "But, as you yourself are well aware, sir, it is only a last resource. . . . When Cohen gets his munitions we should be overwhelmed."

"So we shall be if we wait where we are," cried Thring.

Parker bowed once more.

"Unless we bring back the rest of the fleet to England, sir," he answered.

The Admiral stamped his foot impatiently.

"Good God, man!" he exclaimed scornfully, "can you show me where to put my hands on the coal?"

Parker inclined his head.

"I believe I can do that, sir," he replied calmly.

Both Thring and Rouse uttered a deep curse simultaneously.

"Please bear with me a moment, gentlemen, while I explain," continued Parker hastily. "Am I right in my surmise that there isn't a single ton of coal at Las Palmas?"

"The Huns have taken jolly good care of that," grunted the Admiral.

"But I believe that ocean liners still call at the port as usual," said Parker serenely.

Admiral Rouse's weather-beaten face was suddenly wreathed in smiles.

"What are you driving at, you rascal?" he cried, with a chuckle of delight.

"Heaven helps those who help themselves," resumed Parker. "I venture to suggest, sir, that you should begin to help yourself at once. . . . When the next ship comes within range of your guns, hold her up, and empty her bunkers."

The Admiral gave a crow of delight.

"By Jingo, he's got it! . . . Why the devil didn't I think of that before?"

"And, damn it all, it's so elementary," added the enraptured Thring.

"The Boche showed us the uses of piracy, gentlemen, in the Great War," observed Parker. "It'll give the League of Nations something to think about if you take a leaf out of the Hun book."

"You'll send a wireless to Grand Canary, Rouse, this very minute," babbled Thring.

The Admiral nodded.

"With luck we ought to have the ships home within a month," he replied.

"Of course, sir, you'll cut the cables and destroy the Marconi station at Teneriffe," said the resourceful Parker.

Slapping his thigh, the Admiral hurried off to the wireless operator.

"The world is getting a funnier place every day," Thring muttered to himself. "Fancy my old butler teaching an admiral his business!"

During the next few weeks there were remarkable happenings in the harbour of Las Palmas, and the inhabitants of Cape Town and Buenos Ayres and Bremen and Hamburg were greatly perturbed because so many liners were overdue.

VIII

THE *coup d'état* for which Anymoon was responsible had been well timed. Directly he had received information that Cohen was going to import arms from abroad he

perceived that he must act at once or it would be too late. In another month the new tyranny would be able to defy any attempt to overthrow it.

The atrocities of the anarchists had alienated the majority of the people. Terror and suspicion reigned everywhere. No man felt safe; thousands lived in hourly dread lest they should be proscribed. Thus, immediately Anymoon made his *hegira* from London to Taunton a crowd of loyal adherents had flocked to his banner, and all the old National Service officers who had escaped massacre either joined him or else fled to Lancashire to assist Hothersall.

It was soon evident that the revolutionaries would prove a formidable army. Hundreds of them arrived in the rebel camps with sporting guns, retrieved from some mysterious hiding-place, and a store of freshly-loaded cartridges—invaluable weapons, since it was manifest that the ensuing warfare would be waged at close quarters. It appeared probable that the great battle for supremacy between Cohen and Anymoon would resemble some of the contests of 1745.

Practically, it was a race with the clock. If the forces in the north and the west could fall upon the anarchists before the arrival of the munitions from Germany it seemed likely that they would force a victory. Or, failing such a decision, the issue of the struggle would depend upon whether Admiral Rouse could bring his fleet from the Canary Islands in time to prevent Cohen from drilling and arming his troops and thus establishing his government on a firm basis.

. . . . . .

It was a wild afternoon in early March, the remnants of a great storm blowing from the west. A small motor-car was humming along the road between Bristol and Bridgwater. A rosy-cheeked boy was driving and two young ladies were seated at the back. Presently one of them bent over the chauffeur.

"Are you sure you're going right, Douglas?" she asked anxiously.

"It's a straight road, Miss Dalrymple," he replied cheerily; "it's impossible to go wrong."

"Drive as fast as you can," she continued. "We shan't be nervous."

"Righto. . . . We'll be in Taunton within the hour."

"Won't it be splendid to feel safe?" sighed Betty, as Grace resumed her seat beside her.

They had come by sea from Liverpool in a coasting vessel bound for Bideford, but the recent gale had compelled the captain to run up the Channel to Bristol. Events had been moving fast in the north. A week previously Hothersall's forces had marched southward with the object of co-operating with Anymoon's army in Somersetshire. The time had come to strike while Cohen's troops were still disorganised.

Cyril Thring had been afraid to leave Grace and Betty in Lancashire. The county still swarmed with aliens, and when the forces of law and order were withdrawn—and every righteous man was required to march against Cohen—it was certain that there would be riot and bloodshed. It seemed obviously the best plan to send the girls to Devonshire, where the people were wholly loyal to the counter-revolution.

So they had proceeded to the west country by sea in charge of a trustworthy skipper and accompanied by Douglas, who was proud to act as the squire of dames, and was exhilarated also by the expectation of enrolling himself under the banner of his uncle at Taunton. The storm, however, had not only made their journey longer but also a far more perilous one. On their arrival at Bristol they had found that city divided in its allegiance, the Bolsheviks having a considerable following. The fate of the nation was hanging in the balance. Hothersall's army, under the command of a capable soldier, had gained control of the railways as far south as Birmingham; but a large force of Crimson Guards, hurriedly mobilised and equipped with German rifles, was advancing against it from the south with the object of overwhelming it before it could effect a juncture with Anymoon.

Since it was unsafe to remain at Bristol, because of their relationship with the leader of the counter-revolution, Douglas and his two companions had determined to push on at once to Taunton. No trains were running, and it was reported that some of the scouting parties of the enemy had penetrated into Wiltshire; yet they had no alternative but to make a dash for safety. After some difficulty, they had discovered an adherent of Anymoon who lent them a car for the purpose. Fortunately, Douglas, who had revelled in petrol since childhood, was an experienced driver, for no chauffeur could be induced to accompany them.

The first twenty miles of their journey were uneventful. The road was in a fair condition and the engine ran smoothly. The blustering south-west gale rolling up the Channel flung the salt breath of the sea into their nostrils, bathing their faces in a cool, delicious flood. The air was balmy, and the sun burst through the clouds now and then radiantly. Suddenly, as they were approaching Highbridge, Douglas jammed on the brakes and peered over the bonnet of the car with a dark frown. Far down the highway the surface had been broken up and tree-trunks and boulders were strewn along it.

"Great Scot," he cried, "they've blocked the road!"

"Are you sure?" demanded Grace, with a little gasp.

"Look," he answered, pointing. "It has been ploughed up as far as you can see."

"Oh, but can't you rush through it?" said Betty.

Douglas shook his head.

"There's nothing for it, I'm afraid, but to run round by Wells or Glastonbury," he replied, drawing out his map.

A few moments later, as he was backing the car in order to turn, two Crimson Guards sprang from behind the hedge, where they had been lurking in the expectation of intercepting some messenger between Bristol and Taunton. One of them levelled a shot-gun at the boy, while the other, armed with the inevitable pike, brandished his weapon in the faces of the girls.

"Out you get, all of you," shouted the man with the gun.

There was no alternative but to obey. Douglas had a loaded revolver in his side pocket, but with the muzzle of the gun within a few inches of his chest it was impossible to draw it. With rage in his heart he brought the car to a standstill, and they all descended into the road.

"Hands up," cried the man with the pike; and while his comrade covered Douglas with his gun, he proceeded to examine his pockets. On finding his pistol he gave an ejaculation of glee.

"We can do with this sort of stuff," he muttered. "The chaps on your side have got too much of it."

The other guardsman pointed to the fields.

"Get along in front," he growled; "and go slow, or I'll blow you to bits."

Sick at heart, they did as they were told, the girls with their hands clasped together and with blanched cheeks, but trying bravely to conquer their fears. Douglas glanced hither and thither, seeking incessantly for some means of escape. He saw that it was hopeless. Not a human being was in sight. An illimitable expanse of lonely fields stretched far and wide in every direction, with the sea gleaming grey and foam-flecked in the west. Their captors pressed on closely behind, growling forth threats and curses if they quickened speed or if they made a stumble.

For half a mile or more they skirted the damaged highway, keeping close to the roadside. The sun was still high in the heaven, bursting at intervals through the fleecy clouds, and the breeze seemed to be dying down. Looking at his wrist-watch, Douglas saw that it was three o'clock. At the same time he observed that they were approaching a little village. It was a tiny hamlet, with scarcely more than a score of cottages, but he noticed that the streets were filled with people. As they drew nearer the man with the gun gave a wild halloo, while his companion blew a whistle. Some of the crowd in the streets waved back in response, and Douglas perceived

that their arms were encircled by the scarlet band. It was apparent that they were an advance party of the enemy.

In a few minutes they were marching up the village street, while the Crimson Guards clustered around them with triumphant shouts. The capture of the ladies seemed to delight them greatly, for they slapped their two comrades on the back and cheered wildly, but they refrained from offering any insult. Obviously, they were the forerunners of some desperate enterprise and realised their peril, for the faces of all were grim and stern. Closing around the prisoners, they led them towards the most considerable building in the place, which evidently in former times had been a beer-house. It was a long low room in which they found themselves when the Crimson Guards hustled them through the narrow doorway—a room that reeked of tobacco smoke and the smell of cooking. A young man with pale cheeks and a cruel mouth was seated at the end of a table, and directly Douglas beheld him he recognised him as the person with whom he had fought in his uncle's library.

Recognition shone in Larcey's fierce eyes at the same moment. He glanced from the boy to the two girls with a bitter smile, and then turned abruptly to the man with the gun.

"Who are these?" he demanded.

"We caught 'em on the road to Bridgwater. They were in a car."

Larcey nodded approvingly.

"Good . . . it will be useful to us. . . . Did you ask them any questions?"

"I didn't know what to ask," answered the man. "I thought I'd leave that job to you."

Larcey's smile grew more bitter. He surveyed Douglas for an instant in silence.

"We have met before," he said at last, in a voice that rang with triumph. "You came out on top then, but I fancy it is my turn now." His eyes wandered to Grace and Betty. "Miss Dalrymple and Mrs. Thring,"

he continued, with a mocking bow. "I've got some valuable hostages indeed! You won't be surprised when I tell you that I am going to hold you as a security for the good conduct of your friends."

"Surely I shall be sufficient," cried Douglas indignantly. "Keep me and let the ladies go on to Taunton."

"I shall keep you all," retorted Larcey exultantly. "It's only lately that I've had the chance of giving women of your class a little of their deserts. . . . They used to gorge all the good things of life while their poor sisters toiled and starved, but the boot's on the other leg now, and they'll have to do a bitter penance for their sins. . . . Take 'em away," he cried to the Crimson Guards, "and see that they're kept safely under lock and key till I've need of them."

With a growl of approval at this explosion of class hatred the guardsmen pushed their three captives from the room. The crowd outside greeted their appearance with eager questions, following them closely as they marched down the village street. At last they halted before a small wooden building. A door was pushed open and the girls were thrust into an empty cattle shed, after which the door was locked and bolted from outside. Douglas was dragged on a little farther to the adjoining compartment, a roomy barn half full of straw. One of his jailers approached with a coil of rope.

"I reckon it'll be best to hobble yer, my lad, afore we go," he said, with a chuckle. "I don't like the notion of leaving yer free to move about."

In a few seconds his wrists and ankles were securely bound and he was hurled down upon the straw. Then the door of the barn closed with a crash, and he was left alone in semi-darkness.

He lay still for a while, listening. The tramp of footsteps outside the shed told him that a sentry had been placed there. Even without that escape was hopeless enough. The wooden walls were strong and new, and it was impossible to burst his bonds. Presently a thought struck him. Crawling to the partition that divided the

barn from the cowshed, he began to tap vigorously. Soon there came answering taps from the other side, and he knew that the girls had heard him. It made him less lonely to think that they could communicate thus. He was knocking once more when the door flew open and one of the Crimson Guards was scowling at him in the entrance.

"Stop that row," he thundered, levelling his pike. "If I hear it again I'll give you a prod with this."

And with an angry curse he slammed the door.

Douglas sank back into the straw with a weary sigh, his heart throbbing with horror as he reflected upon the peril into which they had fallen. There was no chance of rescue. From the remarks of his captors, he understood that they had been scouring the country, breaking up roads and destroying bridges in order to impede the advance of their enemies, and that in the morning they were going to retire to join the main body. With a cry of rage he strove to burst his bonds, fighting desperately but in vain to loosen the cord that bound his hands. In the midst of his struggles his foot struck against an object lying on the floor.

It gave forth a metallic ring. Eagerly he crawled towards it, and as he bent over it in the dim light he saw to his great joy that it was a knife. Hurriedly he covered it over with the straw. Given time, he realised that he would be able to free himself now, and he gazed around the shed with exultation in his heart. In the roof above his head, within reach of the rafters, there was a small window. To swarm up thither by the crevices and projections in the wall would be an easy task. If he were left to himself, he felt confident that he could break out of his prison.

In an agony of suspense he waited for the short spring afternoon to draw to a close. Twilight came, and soon the barn was plunged into darkness. He lay with his knife beneath him, hardly daring to hope that he would be left alone all through the night. It seemed most probable that some of the Crimson Guards would come

to sleep here. At least, so he fancied, a jailer would be placed over him.

Several hours after sunset the door of the shed opened once more and the sentry appeared with a slice of bread and a mug of water. Placing these by the side of the boy, he departed without a word. It was about ten o'clock according to Douglas's reckoning, for the moon, now almost at the full, was gleaming through the window overhead. There was much chattering down the village street and a babble of rough voices as the soldiers made their way to their billets. Still no one entered the barn.

Douglas waited for an hour longer until he judged that it was eleven o'clock. There was no sound outside except the tread of the sentry on guard. Taking the knife between his fingers, he crawled to the wall of the shed. Placing the handle in his mouth and pressing the tip firmly into the woodwork he commenced to rub the rope which bound his wrists backwards and forwards against the blade. Although blunt, it was sufficient for the purpose. In five minutes one of the strands gave way and soon another had been cut through. Wriggling his hands through the coils, he slashed at the cord that bound his legs.

Directly he was free he clambered up the wall and got astride one of the rafters. Creeping along the beam he raised himself to his feet and made an examination of the window. To his joy he discovered that it lifted on a hinge and was fastened only by a catch from inside. In an instant he had crawled through on to the roof. The moon was sinking behind a belt of clouds and the sentry was pacing up and down the village street with a gun under his arm. Sliding down noiselessly, Douglas dropped to the ground on the other side.

IX

At ten o'clock on the same evening Anymoon and Darell were in conference together in an upper room of their headquarters at Taunton with triumph on their faces, for they had just received the best of good news. A portion of the fleet had arrived from Las Palmas and some of the ships were already in the Bristol Channel in order to aid the army in the west. The others had joined Admiral Rouse at the Nore, whence they could menace the capital.

"He can take London with a thousand men," exclaimed Anymoon. "Ninety-five per cent of the people will welcome him. And then Cohen will have him at his back."

"I don't think his fellows will care to face the sailors' guns," observed Darell.

Anymoon's eyes blazed defiantly.

"And he will have to reckon with us too. . . . We can now join hands with the men from the north."

"Yes; the ships as usual make all the difference," said Darell.

They had good reason for elation, for besides the reinforcement of seamen and marines that were coming to them from the coast they had been informed that the fleet had brought them a supply of rifles, obtained on the voyage home by the order of Admiral Rouse from far-seeing speculators at Lisbon and at Bordeaux, in defiance of all the canons of the League of Nations.

"Not one Englishman in a thousand approves of this reign of terror," cried Anymoon, with a characteristic burst of metaphor. "It has fallen upon an infinitely more sterile soil than in old France and modern Russia. . . . In any case, Darell, the crop would have been a scanty one. . . . The seeds have scarcely taken root."

"It's quite time they were dug up," answered Darell

dryly. "I hold to the old-fashioned view that every nation gets the government it deserves. . . . There are plenty of scoundrels in all countries, and ours have been having the time of their lives. . . . Honest men have only themselves to blame for being snowed under."

"Incorrigible pessimist," cried Anymoon exuberantly. "You have no faith in human nature."

"Not when it is allowed to hark back to its primitive instincts," replied Darell. "Scratch your next-door neighbour and you'll find a cave man. . . . Have you ever seen a crowd of urchins fighting for coppers or a well-dressed mob pushing through a turnstile? . . . We are only decent members of society as long as we are properly policed."

"Ah, but who are to be the police?" exclaimed Anymoon, smoothing his brow. "That is the great problem."

A secretary entered the room with the news that a messenger from the enemy had just arrived in a car. With a look of surprise, Anymoon gave the order that he was to be shown upstairs. A few moments later the secretary returned with one of the Crimson Guards, who, taking a note from his pocket, handed it churlishly to the ex-President. Anymoon gave an ejaculation of rage as he cast his eyes over it.

"Good God, Darell, listen to this," he cried; "it's from that fanatic, Larcey. . . .

"'I leave my present quarters at four o'clock in the morning. . . . Mrs. Thring and Miss Dalrymple are prisoners in my hands. . . . I shall shoot them before I go unless you return with the bearer of this and surrender yourself.'"

With a white face Darell turned fiercely upon the messenger.

"Where do you come from?" he demanded.

"I'm not to tell you," the man replied.

"I'll keep him as a hostage," roared Anymoon.

"Then the women 'll have to stand the consequences," the man retorted.

With beating heart Darell racked his brains to find some plan of meeting the terrible emergency. In a few moments he had made up his mind.

"Go and get your car ready," he said to the messenger. "I am coming to your camp."

He sat down at the table and began to write hurriedly, while the man shuffled to the door.

"You can't go by yourself," cried Anymoon. "A party must follow to track these fellows down. . . . We can overwhelm them easily."

Darell shook his head.

"Think of the girls. . . . Larcey will anticipate that we shall act thus and he will be on his guard. . . . No, I must go alone."

"But I can help you, and I will."

"Certainly," replied Darell, handing a piece of paper to his chief. "Send this message by wireless to the ships lying off the Bridgwater bar. . . . We shall find efficient aid there."

"But how will the sailors know where to find you?"

"Our friends were coming by sea, so they have landed somewhere on the coast. . . . Larcey must have intercepted them on the Bristol road. . . . With luck the sailors will have rounded him up before daylight."

"But he will scuttle off as soon as he has got hold of you——"

"No, for we shall delay him. . . . You can keep his messenger as a hostage, as you suggested. . . . If I remain, Larcey will agree to exchange his man for the ladies."

Anymoon gazed at his secretary gravely for a moment or two without speaking.

"And the rest is in the lap of the gods."

"Yes," answered Darell, with a grim smile. "I believe that I shall be able to release the girls. . . . But if the sailor-men do not hit the spot I am afraid we shall have a bad time."

The emissary from the enemy was greatly enraged

when told that he was to be detained, for, aware that Larcey held three valuable hostages, he had imagined that he himself was inviolable. Anymoon endeavoured, by threats of instant death, to make him disclose the place where Larcey and his followers were quartered, but knowing that his captors dare not proceed to extremities, the man refused to give the information.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Darell departed alone with the driver of the car on his desperate mission. The fellow was a Crimson Guard, like the other, gruff and taciturn, full of wrath also because his companion was not allowed to accompany him. He drove along at a furious speed, refusing to utter a single word. Having tried in vain once or twice to persuade the fellow to speak, Darell made no further attempt. After all, the man's silence was of no importance. Even had he been beguiled into an involuntary disclosure of their destination, the news could not affect the issue now. It was impossible to communicate it to the fleet. Darell realised that, unless fortune was wondrously propitious, he was sacrificing himself in the endeavour to save the lives of his friends. It was probable that his surrender would induce Larcey to exchange the two girls for the man held prisoner at Taunton, for he would reason that if the messenger were left to his fate, he might purchase his safety by guiding the enemy in their chase of him. Still it was possible that he might risk the chance and abandon his emissary in order to gratify his lust for revenge. In the end Darell's sacrifice might be unavailing, but there was no alternative but to make it. No other expedient was possible.

His heart throbbed with anguish for the girl he loved as the car sped northward in the moonlit night, bearing him towards her. He was filled with rage at the thought of her being in the power of rough and cruel men. All that he could do for her he had done, and yet it might be futile. In the end, perhaps, it would mean that they would die together.

Within half an hour they had passed through Bridg-

water, an eerie and deserted town, gleaming white and ghost-like. The broad river flashed beneath and soon they were rushing along the Huntspill Level with the smell of the sea in their faces. The breeze was fading away and the straggling clouds were scattered loosely over the sky. A few minutes later they were on the other side of the railway line, leaving Highbridge behind them. The car rushed onwards with increasing speed.

Darell was glancing seaward, towards Burnham, beyond which lay the battleships which alone could bring him succour, when there was an exclamation of surprise from the driver, and the car suddenly came to a standstill. A man was standing in the middle of the road with a gun at his shoulder, evidently resolved that the car should not pass.

"Hands up!" he commanded in a ringing voice, and with the muzzle pointed at the chauffeur's head he ran forward.

The moonlight was shining full upon his face, and as Darell recognised him, hope leapt into his heart. At the same instant the newcomer gave a shout of delight.

"Mr. Darell! . . . And you have a car. What wonderful luck!"

"Are the ladies safe?" Darell demanded tremulously.

"Yes," answered the boy joyously; "but we must be quick if we are to release them."

Darell seized the driver by the wrist.

"Shoot this fellow, Douglas, if he makes a sound," he exclaimed. "I'm going to tie him up."

With the help of their handkerchiefs and a few strips of leather, cut from the cushions of the tonneau, the Crimson Guard was soon bound hand and foot. To complete the work, he was gagged securely with his own scarf and lifted out on to the ground. With a sigh of thankfulness Darell turned to Douglas.

"Your coming is the best thing that could have happened. . . . Where is Miss Dalrymple?"

Douglas jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Not half a mile down the road. . . . I've just escaped.

. . . I was lucky enough to find a stake to break the sentry's head, or I shouldn't have this gun."

Darell clutched the boy's arm.

"Tell me where to find her," he cried eagerly.

"They're both in a wooden shed, the first building you come to. . . . I'll show you the way."

Darell pointed quickly towards the sea.

"Burnham is within a couple of miles from here. . . . Two battle-cruisers are lying off the shore, and they may land a party at any moment. . . . You must act as their guide."

The boy gave a low whistle of delight.

"Magnificent! . . . Larcey's going to get it in the neck."

Darell produced an electric torch from his pocket.

"Do you know the Morse code?" he inquired. Douglas nodded. "Then take this. . . . If you signal 'The time has come' you are sure to get a reply from the ships. Then tell them to land as big a force as they can."

"And you'll bring the ladies to the car?"

Darell clenched his teeth.

"I hope so . . . but in case they capture me I am relying on you to bring help."

"There'll be no one to stop you," replied the boy jubilantly; "they're all asleep. . . . And I'm sure that fellow whose skull I cracked hasn't awoke."

After asking one or two more questions Darell proceeded down the road, while Douglas struck across the fields towards the coast. . . . Since the night was so bright he was able to run at top speed, and in less than half an hour he had reached the outskirts of the watering-place. Like the other seaport it was deserted. Not a lamp was shining in the street; not a light glimmered in any of the windows. Since the crimson claws of anarchy had fastened their cruel grip upon the land the little town was falling fast into ruin.

The boy turned down the main street on to the esplanade. The sea was rolling upon the shore in great,

sullen waves, and the moon was sinking into a bank of clouds. He could hear nothing save the roar of the breakers. He hastened on through the darkness towards the pier, flashing his torch as he went. Then the iron gates loomed in front of him, and scaling them he rushed along the wooden platform, peering eagerly over the side as he went. He had scarcely run half a dozen yards when the dazzling rays of a search-light shone through the night.

A little flock of picket-boats was dancing upon the waves around the end of the pier, and in the bright beams from the warship crowds of seamen were springing on the iron landing-stage. With a cry of joy Douglas leapt forward. A naval officer was coming up the stairway towards him.

X

MEANWHILE Darell had reached the village where Larcey and his troop had quartered themselves. Although he approached it stealthily, crawling along for the last hundred yards on his hands and knees, caution was superfluous, for not a soul was to be seen. Apparently, the sentry who had been sent to watch over the prisoners was deemed a sufficient guard, for there were no others. Darell came across him lying motionless on his back, his hair matted with blood.

This discovery also left him in no doubt that the wooden shed by the roadside was the place in which the two girls were immured. The boy's instructions had been explicit. It was the second door in the building which led to their prison. Stealing under the shadow of the barn, Darell made his way carefully along the woodwork. In the bright light he could see that the key was in the lock and that a couple of bolts also barred the entrance. Noiselessly unloosing the fastenings he slowly opened the door.

Grace was standing a few paces from the threshold, whither she had advanced at the sound of his coming, with clenched hands, proud and defiant. The moonbeams, streaming through the open door, shone full upon her face, which, pale as death, was stamped with unutterable woe. A dishevelled lock of hair lay in a golden cluster upon her shoulder, and her full red lips were parted by a deep intake of breath. Then, as she recognised her lover, the defiance faded from her blazing eyes and she flung herself with a sob into his arms.

"How brave of you to come," she murmured. "Oh, I thought it was one of those terrible men."

"I am going to save you, darling," he whispered, as he kissed her passionately.

"They will kill you, too," she cried in terror; "why, why did you come?"

"Hush, dearest," he answered soothingly. "Douglas has escaped. . . . I have a car within half a mile. . . . Where is Betty?"

Grace snatched herself from his arms, and he followed her glance as she turned from him. A few yards away Betty was lying in one of the mangers upon a bed of straw. Exhausted nature had administered a merciful anodyne, for she was sleeping as tranquilly as a child. Her brown lashes rested upon her cheeks, which still bore the flush of health, and there was a smile upon her lips. And while they were gazing upon her she stirred in her slumber and her eyes opened. With a little gasp of amazement she struggled to her feet.

"Kenneth!" she cried; "it's splendid of you. . . . How did you manage it?"

"Come," he answered abruptly, "let me take you away."

"Douglas, too," she replied, pointing to the wall. "He's in there."

"No," exclaimed Darell; "with good luck Douglas will soon be with a couple of hundred sailors."

"Oh, but how?" said Betty.

"I guessed you were somewhere on the road near here,"

he answered, "so I ordered the ships to land a force at Burnham and Bridgwater."

Grace drew a long sigh of relief.

"Then you have saved us," she said fervently.

They were moving towards the entrance when there was a footfall outside, and a tall figure appeared in the doorway.

"I think you had all better stay where you are," exclaimed a rough voice, and they saw that Larcey was standing before them.

"I'm much obliged for your visit, Darell," he continued mockingly. "I didn't think I should have the luck to nab you, too."

With an angry cry Kenneth strode forward to grapple with the anarchist. Larcey chuckled as he raised a revolver.

"If you move another step I shall have to blow your brains out before the ladies," he observed mockingly.

Grace clutched her lover by the arm, thinking only of restraining his rashness.

"You must be an idiot if you imagine that you'd take me unprepared," continued Larcey triumphantly. "My scouts saw you arrive in the car. . . . Two of 'em are gone after that cursed boy."

"I am very sure that they won't catch him," said Darell.

"If he hadn't the luck of the devil he wouldn't have got away at all," answered Larcey. "Unluckily I put a fool to guard him. . . . I'm glad the fellow's had his deserts." He paused, gloating over his prisoners exultantly. "But the boy 'll not escape, and make no mistake about it. . . . I'm sending another party into Burnham after him. . . . I'll shoot him alongside of you all in the morning."

Darell perceived with delight that Larcey had no suspicion of the arrival of the battleships. For a moment he had cursed his own stupidity in leaving the shot-gun in the car, but he realised now that since his enemies were aware of his presence amongst them he would not have

been able to escape with his companions even if he had succeeded in overpowering their captain.

"I want to discuss terms with you," he replied coolly, after a pause. "I came here originally with the intention of surrendering myself. . . . It was not until I found that the boy had escaped and I believed that you were all asleep that I purposed to release these ladies."

Larcey smiled derisively.

"Well, you've made a pretty bungle of it all," he retorted.

"So far, perhaps," resumed Darell. "What I propose is this. . . . Send the ladies under a flag of truce into Taunton in exchange for me."

"No, no, Kenneth," cried Grace vehemently; "I will not allow it."

Larcey gave a scornful laugh.

"Why should I exchange you when I've got you?"

"Because it is just and fair. . . . If there had been time I should have tried to negotiate the exchange, and probably you would have agreed. . . . Consent now. It is to your interest to behave with common humanity so as to receive reciprocal treatment from us."

"I've no use for you," snarled Larcey. "I want Anymoon."

Darell shook his head.

"That is out of the question."

"Very well . . . then you three'll have to take the consequences . . . and so will the youngster when I catch him."

Darell folded his arms proudly.

"I suppose you are aware that we have detained your messenger at Taunton?"

"What do I care?" thundered Larcey fiercely. "I took the precaution of sending you the biggest fool I've got. . . . Shoot him and hang him if you like. . . . It makes no odds to me."

"If you will release the ladies," persisted Darell, "your man will be returned to you and you will still have me to wreak your vengeance upon."

"I cannot consent to that, Kenneth," exclaimed Grace. "Let Betty go. . . . I will stay with you."

Suddenly Larcey burst forth into a torrent of rage.

"As soon as it's light I'll hang the lot of you outside this barn. . . . And so I'll treat any of your class that I can lay my hands on. . . . D'you think I'm going to be hindered by any obsolete notions of right and wrong? . . . We're fighting a crusade, I tell you, the battle of man against privilege—the battle of equality. . . . We're all going to start level in this world, and to do that we've got to stamp out all those that have set themselves above the ruck. . . . We've no use for what you call ladies: we've no use for so-called men of culture. . . . We're going to begin the race of life afresh, and we're all going to set off from the same mark."

"Some will get in front of the others, nevertheless," said Darell cynically.

"Possibly, but they'll get there by merit and not because their forebears have bequeathed them intellect by reason of their belonging to a privileged class for generations. . . . If you stop bequest of money you must stop the bequest of brains that have come through money. . . . And to do that you'll have to sweep the children of the old ruling-classes from the face of the earth. . . . Heredity, if it's to be fair, has got to start afresh."

"In other words," said Darell, "you propose to massacre everyone whose father did not belong to the people."

Larcey's cruel eyes gloated fiercely upon his prisoner.

"Aye, that would be my panacea," he exclaimed, "but whether my party will have the pluck to carry it through I cannot say. . . . If they do it they will regenerate the earth. . . . If they do not they will be swamped sooner or later, as they always have been in the past."

"Yours is a charming creed," replied Darell, "but I'll do you the justice to admit that it is a perfectly logical one."

"The people had a glimmering of the truth in the French Revolution," continued Larcey. "The mistake they made was not using the guillotine more vigorously."

A couple of Crimson Guards crossed the threshold. Larcey turned to them fiercely.

"Lock this door," he commanded, retiring across the threshold, but still covering Darell with his revolver as he went, "and let half a dozen of you stay outside all night. . . . Call me at six o'clock." He paused for a moment, gazing truculently upon the little group inside the shed. "There'll be three fewer gentlefolks in the world," he added scornfully, "at six-thirty."

Then the door was shut and the two girls and their companion were left in their prison.

"I fancy that he will be awakened before six o'clock," said Darell, with a light laugh; "possibly he may not have time even to get to sleep."

"Oh, Kenneth, is it certain that help is coming?" cried Grace in a tremulous voice, nestling close to him in the darkness.

"Supposing Douglas is overtaken," cried Betty, trying in vain to keep back her tears.

"I saw him run," answered Darell confidently, "and seeing the start he had, I'm quite sure that no one can catch him."

They waited in silence, for their suspense was too poignant for words. Grace and her lover sat with clasped hands, each seeking to reassure the other by the fond pressure of their fingers. Every minute seemed interminable, and the strident voices of the sentries outside jarred harshly on their nerves. Two of them evidently were lounging against the door, for the foul odour of their tobacco was borne through the interstices. The others were tramping up and down the road incessantly, spluttering forth coarse oaths and laughing uproariously.

Striking a match, Darell at length glanced impatiently at his watch. It was a few minutes past one o'clock.

"Oh, when are the sailors coming?" murmured Betty.

"It is scarcely time yet," answered Darell.

Presently, there was a hubbub in the street, with the clattering of armed men. A moment later the door of the shed was flung open, and amidst the glare of lanterns

Larcey strode across the entrance through a little crowd of Crimson Guards. He glared at his prisoners vindictively.

"I believe you're laying a trap for me," he thundered.

Darell sprang to his feet, his heart sinking at the thought that his plot had been discovered.

"We're going to make tracks," continued Larcey fiercely; "maybe some of your rebels will be on to us if we tarry here till daylight. . . . It'd be like your cursed treachery and I'll not risk it."

"I swear that not a soul will move from Taunton before morning," cried Darell.

Larcey laughed contemptuously.

"I'm not going to wait and see," he shouted. "We're moving on now. . . . But first of all I'm going to have some dealings with you."

He gave a peremptory gesture, and two of his followers came forward with a coil of rope in their hands.

"Stay," said Darell in desperation. "You do not understand your position. The fleet has come home and has declared for us. . . . In a week or two Cohen will have fallen. . . . Then your life will have to answer for ours."

"Liar," retorted Larcey, with an oath; "keep your prophecies for those that ask for them."

"If you will be merciful to these ladies," continued Darell in a ringing voice, "I will promise that you yourself shall be treated as a prisoner of war. . . . Nay, more than that, I will write you a letter now, setting forth these terms, so that my friends will spare you even if you take my life."

Grace clung piteously upon his arm.

"I cannot accept the sacrifice," she murmured.

"Why, man," cried Larcey in a burst of fury, "even if what you say comes true, do you imagine that they will ever take me alive?"

He moved a step backwards upon the threshold, motioning to his executioners to advance. At the same instant Darell rushed upon him with the mad resolve to

shake the life out of him. For a moment the crowd around the doorway wavered while Larcey retreated into the roadway, fumbling desperately for his revolver. Then, close at hand, a little way down the village street, came the loud rattle of a machine gun.

Beyond the entrance of the shed the surging group of Crimson Guards was flung hither and thither, mowed down like grass before a reaping-machine. Darell's foot was on the threshold, and he was in the act of springing out upon his enemy when Larcey's tall figure was crumpled up and shattered, collapsing like a rag that is tossed upon the ground by a gust of wind. Dark forms began to flit in terror down the street; writhing figures quivered in anguish in the road. There were wild cries for mercy and agonised shrieks of pain. And in the distance a burst of triumphant cheering rang out into the night. In a few moments the troop of Crimson Guards had been swept off the earth.

Five minutes later, Douglas, followed by three or four red-faced midshipmen, dashed into the entrance of the shed and danced with glee around Darell and the two girls.

XI

Some weeks later, on a sunlit afternoon in the middle of April, eight men were sitting round a table in the Admiral's cabin on board the flagship in Plymouth Sound. Scarcely a ripple stirred the glittering surface of the harbour, and through the portholes there were radiant glimpses of the green heights of Mount Edgcumbe and the yellow stretches of Cawsand Bay. A servant had just entered with a telegraph message, and Admiral Rouse was glancing over it with a smile.

"It seems that Cohen surrendered near Worcester this morning," he said, looking up at his colleagues; "what are we going to do with him?"

"If there's owt at all like a yard-arm on a modern battleship," muttered Hothersall, thrusting out his thick brown beard combatively, "I reckon that's his proper spot."

"No, no," interrupted Anymoon peremptorily; "we must make no martyrs. . . . Poetic justice will be satisfied by deporting him to Palestine."

The President, who was arrayed in a new grey frock-coat, was the picture of health, his eyes bright and defiant, his cheeks bronzed by sun and wind. The open-air life of the last few months had also diminished his girth by several inches. He was a healthier Anymoon than he had ever been before.

"It'd be a severe punishment for one of his race," observed Thring cynically, with his finger-tips together an inch or two below his hooked nose. "Since our victory has been such an easy one couldn't we afford to be more generous?"

"It'll serve him right," said Phillips, the London councillor, upon whom the sarcasm was lost; "think of all the bloody murders he's responsible for."

"Most of 'em are avenged, lad, if you southerners went for them Crimson Guards same as my chaps," responded Hothersall grimly; "we took no prisoners."

"It was a famous victory," murmured Phillips, with a far-away look in his yearning eyes, and wholly oblivious to the subtlety of his quotation. "We can now pick up the threads where we left them."

The massive Crannock cleared his throat impatiently.

"They are in too great a tangle, my friend," he remarked; "let's begin with something without any knots."

"Then we shall have to go to heaven," said Anymoon sententiously; "the work of reconstruction is going to be some task."

"I agree with Crannock," interposed Darell eagerly; "you can't have social reconstruction without political tranquillity."

"Aye, we need a bit of rest," growled Hothersall.

"Things can never be the same again," observed the Admiral, with emphasis.

Each of his seven auditors started perceptibly. The familiar old tag had an ominous sound, for it suggested revolution, and they remembered whither it had led them.

"We want drastic legislation with regard to aliens," sneered Cyril; "we've been at the mercy of international foreigners long enough."

"Yes," repeated the Admiral, with a sparkle in his blue eyes; "things will never be the same again."

Anymoon's fingers were suddenly uplifted from the wart on his cheek, which he was caressing, and he stole an inquisitive glance at the sailor.

"What exactly do you mean, Rouse?" he demanded anxiously.

Admiral Rouse smoothed his pointed beard.

"You were talking about reconstruction," he answered, with an ambiguous smile.

"Ah, yes, of course," resumed Anymoon, his fingers playing nervously in his left whisker. "I should like to have your views. . . . You got us out of a bad mess, Rouse, and naturally you are entitled to a voice in the readjustment."

"Well, since you ask my opinion," exclaimed the Admiral, with nautical frankness, "I don't want any more of this damned Socialism!"

An awkward silence fell upon the company. Everyone, except the sailor, avoided the glance of the President. For a moment there was a strange glitter in Anymoon's combative eyes, and then a gleam of mischief stole into them. His lips curled into a smile.

"It hasn't been an unmitigated success, has it?" he responded genially; "you see there are so many fools in the world."

It was a reply that was capable of a double interpretation; but it was apparent that Anymoon meant no offence, and Admiral Rouse did not take any. Each of the company simultaneously drew a breath of relief,

glad that their two leaders had avoided an altercation. There was a determined expression on the sailor's weather-beaten features that boded ill to any who might oppose him.

"I'm pleased you think as I do," he answered firmly, looking steadfastly at Anymoon; "we shall be able to put an end to all this tommy-rot together."

Anymoon met the Admiral's gaze with unflinching eyes, and it was obvious that his glance was sympathetic.

"I didn't want to be the first to make the suggestion," the amazing man answered, with unblushing candour. "It looks so much better coming from you. . . . One has to consider the susceptibilities of one's followers."

There was an audible gasp from the zealous Phillips.

"Surely you do not suggest anything reactionary!" he exclaimed.

"My dear Phillips," replied Anymoon, with an imperious wave of his hand, "do not let us set up any more blessed words. . . . The doctor who cures one of a deadly disease is nothing more nor less than a reactionary. . . . He puts things back again into their proper place."

"I knew he'd come to this in the end," murmured the disillusioned Crannock, with a grunt of satisfaction.

"I'll admit that our Constitution was faulty," stammered poor, bewildered Phillips; "perhaps it would be as well to restore the House of Commons."

"On the whole, I think I would prefer the House of Lords," Anymoon interrupted serenely.

"Yes, of course, we should want two chambers," agreed Phillips.

"And I presume that we shall substitute individual effort in place of State control," observed Thring, with a sly chuckle.

"Aye, aye, let every tub rest on its own bottom," cried Hothersall; "if you ask me, I'm sick to death of Communism. . . . See that all of the tubs are strong and well found and put in a decent spot, and let 'em fend for themselves."

"Within limits," said Phillips reluctantly, "I see no objection to private property."

"But by imposing a limit you ring the death-knell of enterprise," retorted Darell.

"No, he can't have it both ways," muttered Crannock.

"There will have to be great changes," observed the kaleidoscopic Anymoon; "it is only the consistent man who never learns a lesson from previous blunders, and none except pre-war politicians were ever infallible."

"It ought to be quite easy to start again as we left off," said Darell; "the old records are intact. . . . It is only a matter of figures."

"I am vain enough to think that I can manage my estate far more economically than a Government department," remarked Thring.

"But how'll you deal with unearned increment?" demanded the perplexed Phillips.

"There can be no accession to the national wealth without everyone receiving some benefit," replied Crannock.

"But there's the question of degree——" persisted Phillips.

"Of course we shall have to have intelligent by-laws," said Anymoon.

"How about competition?" continued Phillips.

"What of it?" demanded Hothersall. "By gum, it strikes me you cannot have liberty without it."

"Yes, liberty," echoed the Admiral, "that's the whole crux of the matter . . . if we restore personal liberty all the economical details that you are talking about will rearrange themselves automatically. . . . But in order to have liberty there must be a stable government."

"We're going to have that," cried Phillips. "Hasn't Anymoon just declared for two Houses of Parliament!"

"That's not enough," retorted Admiral Rouse; "every rotten little republic has an upper and a lower chamber."

Once more there was an awkward silence. The countenance of each reflected his individual opinions. Phillips looked crestfallen, while the two Thrings were smiling expectantly.

Anymoon again stepped into the breach.

"Ah, I perceive what you have in your mind, Rouse," he exclaimed, with perfect nonchalance; "you think that we have no alternative but to send a loyal message, inviting His Majesty to come back to his own again!"

The Admiral compressed his lips, and there was a fierce light in his eyes.

"That is the price of my adherence," he said imperiously.

"And of mine, too," added Anymoon, with a smile.

. . . . . .

The same evening after dinner, Anymoon, who had been the Admiral's guest for several days, was pacing the quarter-deck alone, pondering deeply and smoking a cigar. At length, he paused in his walk, and, leaning over the rails, gazed across the sombre waters to the lights of Plymouth, which were twinkling merrily in the darkness. Although he had resolved upon a complete renunciation of principles no sense of failure bedimmed his persistent optimism. On the contrary, he was feeling sanguine and exalted.

"The whirligig of time brings in his revenges," he muttered to himself; "they hissed me off the stage as Cromwell, but, by Jove, I'll show them that I can play the part of General Monk."

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