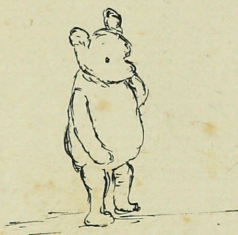


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April 1929.

SILVER NUTMEGS

Other Works by Vernon Knowles

Prose

HERE AND OTHERWHERE
BEADS OF COLOURED DAYS
THE STREET OF QUEER HOUSES

Poetry

THE RIPENING YEARS
POEMS
PRINCE JONATHAN (*in the Press*)



SILVER NUTMEGS

By

VERNON KNOWLES

*I had a little nut tree ;
Nothing would it bear,
But a silver nutmeg . . .*



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TO
C. AND L. K.
BY EXIGENCIES OF FAMILY:
MY UNCLE AND AUNT;
BY EXCESSIVE GOOD FORTUNE:
MY FRIENDS.

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LIST OF DECORATIONS

BY ERIC BAILEY

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THE LADDER

THE LADDER

§

ACCORDING to the majority of maps of England: the village of Finchincombe had no existence.—Those maps, like some people, being solely interested in size and quantity. The more meticulous and conscientious maps acknowledged it, however, and gave its position: remote by some miles from neighbouring villages: snug in a valley surrounded by lonely hills.

Along that valley lay the railroad; but ceded no station to Finchincombe. Without a least sign of apology for the omission did the down or the up trains regret the fact; but passed, rather, with a plainly discernible, snobbish note in their puffing: importantly intent on more populous parts.

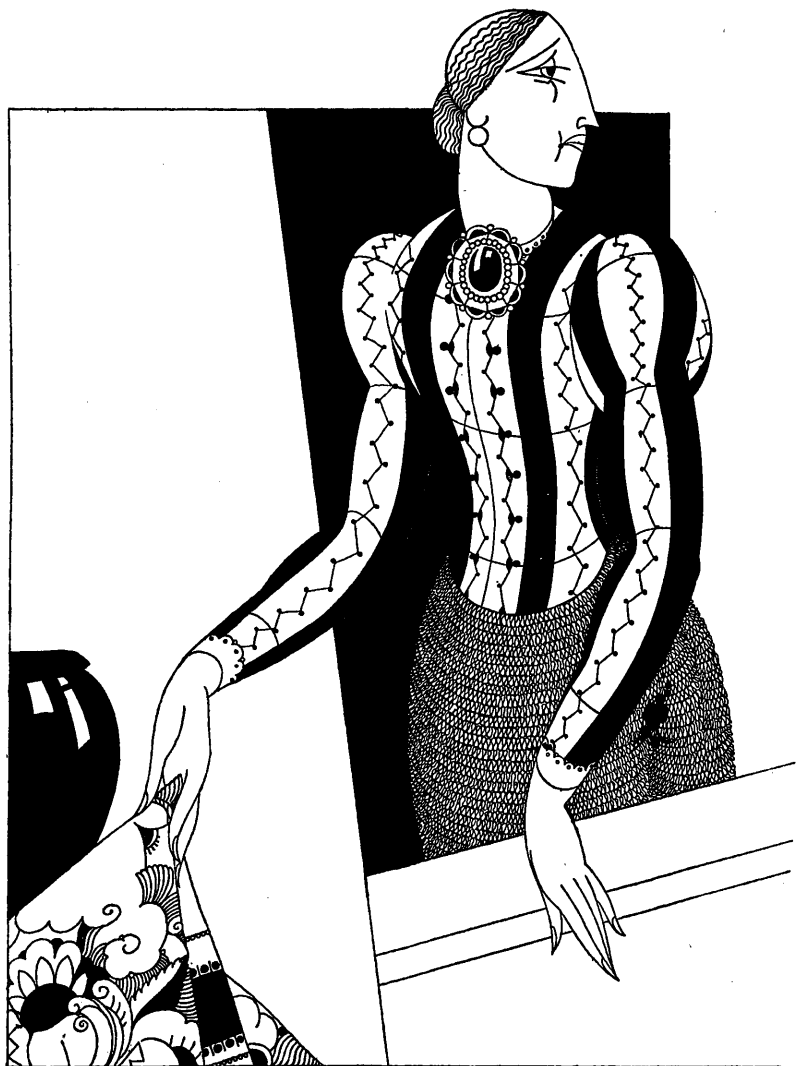
There were many trees on the two hillsides that v'd to the delightful site of the village; and so many crowded that site, it seemed that, long

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ago, the first descending numbers must have been irresistibly giddied and drawn by the depth, and had plunged down: filling it. . . .

In one of the small thatched cottages close to the pump—that central position—lived Mrs. Porter with her son Alan. All the village appreciated the certain streak of adventurousness in the lady's character: an attribute,—long since in whipped subjection to the hard tyranny of respectability,—which had made her depart from out a distant town, and accounted for her appearance in Finchincombe. The delectable details of that adventure were well known to all,—despite Mrs. Porter's initial, ensuing, and continued silence;—discovered originally, no doubt, by means of unfailing intuition;—any village, all villages, strangely enough, possessing this mysterious power, long overlooked, and crassly uninvestigated, by psychologists.

Mrs. Porter was a widow: of long,—and, it was evident, of arduous,—standing. Her face depicted her mind: one saw at a glance that she did not consider life worth while: disappointment sagged the line of her lips; disillusionment and dissatisfaction gloomed her eyes with a sombreness. It was as well that her conviction was thus:



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since she was the resigned possessor of an erratic-natured heart, which might, at any moment, finalize its erratic career: freeing her of all the unwillingly-acquired burden of living, and leaving young Alan an orphan.

Alan, being at that gossamer-textured age that accepted life with unconsidering enjoyment, was anything but a boy, but, by turns, a Red Indian stalking prey in the woods, and torturing pale-faces; a pirate sailing dangerous seas in a constant employment of boarding unsuspecting strangers, and plundering them, succeeded by much exhortive walking of a plank, then carousal with rum; and a grim and frowning general, in command of vast battalions, marching to strenuous battle. . . .

Tho' the maternal love for Alan was deep, in that bosom existed a deep, beyond: furnished with a finer fineness, a more tender tenderness: reserved to the elder son, Leonard. Perhaps it was the adventurous spirit acknowledging, with pride and ecstasy, its kind. For Leonard, ten years back, had run away from home and taken to the sea. Nor had he ever returned,—even for a brief visit. The sea, apparently, held him enchained and altered, with Circe-like enchantments.

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In Mrs. Porter's mind, he was become tall and broad, brown-burnt and bearded, with the easy smile and amused eyes of the wanderer.

Tokens of his continued existence had arrived periodically: gifts despatched from the various ports of call his ship entered: a mat from the East African Coast; a bronze Buddha from India; a sandalwood-casket from West Australia; an embroidered kimono from Japan; a vase hollowed out of Vesuvian lava from Naples. . . . All these, Mrs. Porter, with that extreme of reverence elsewhere accorded sacerdotal relics, placed carefully in the dark recesses of her bedroom cupboard; and only on rare occasions of a specially-gathered company, would produce briefly for a keen, poignant enjoyment of the ensuing roused emotions of admiration and envy exhibited duly by her guests. . . .

Had any one present suggested that the mat might, with advantage, take on the wear of so much passage to and fro of feet, that the square of linoleum in the front-room had long endured, until its strength had given out, here and there, and exposed the floor-boards; or that the bronze Buddha might take the place of honour, enthroned on the topmost tier of the what-not; or the

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sandalwood-casket not inconveniently share with the aspidistra on the small table facing the window, the excitement of observant passers-by; or the kimono replace the aged wrapper donned by herself for part of each morning, and in times of sickness; or the Vesuvian vase be elevated to a like plane with the central-standing clock,—on the mantel-piece;—these uncouth suggestions had come upon Mrs. Porter with the dreadfulness of blasphemy.

It is not, therefore, surprising, in view of this attitude, that when the last report of Leonard arrived from an indecipherable town in Burmah: a mahogany box patterned with mother-o'-pearl and lapis-lazuli: locked with a queer key of marble (how he had come by the box never transpired: the shadowy figure of Leonard leaves this chronicle hereafter): Mrs. Porter was not induced to fit, and turn, the key, and discover the contents. She proceeded as far as shaking the box. A subdued, soft rattling resulted. Curiosity not in her composition, the good lady was quite content. Leonard remembered her. A proof of his love: this elegant box. She placed it carefully away in the bedroom cupboard: to join the other sacred Leonardia.

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Proof of the rightness of her action,—if any were needed,—was afforded by the contents of a letter received from Leonard informing her that the box contained a magic ladder, and enjoining her to use care in its handling. Never was an injunction more superfluous. Mrs. Porter, with great expense of judgment and will, had contrived to live a respectable and difficult life; and she was long past the unripe years and the immature spontaneity that might possibly have caused her to yield to the allurements of experimentation. The almost certain result, she was convinced, would have been calamity. To have toppled, by one imprudent action, all that reared delicate edifice of respectability and difficulty,—was beyond thought. The word “magic” induced a real terror in her heart. The few times when she had come into contact with magic, in its mildest forms, had been fraught with an extreme of discomfort and unpleasantness. She had always taken pains to avoid it. . . . If an inward honeyed voice suggested rewards, and who knows what? Mrs. Porter, with calm and certain grip on her past years of struggle, was not to be tempted. That adventurous spirit was long since entirely subordinated, and had lost the voice

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it had once successfully raised in her councils. She was as happy as anyone had any right to expect to be, she told herself, and the thin line of her lips forced itself to a deeper sagging; and the gloom of her eyes thickened perceptibly. Handling the box as tho', with its interior seething of magic, it might, on an unexpected instant, explode: she had put it carefully, with a deep-seated respect, into the bedroom cupboard. . . .

Alan had clamoured for investigation. His imagination teased him unmercifully. All that day he threw himself unavailingly against the strong wall of Mrs. Porter's decision. And in the night, as he lay in bed, he provided himself with a dozen alternative theories concerning the ladder's exact magical properties; but, sleep intruding, was unable to select the satisfactory one, retain it, and discard the competitive eleven. . . . A day and a night in a boy's life! Slow, lingering minutes, endlessly drawn-out hours: equal to a score of years in a man's experience.—Next morning, Alan had almost forgotten the incident. During the day, the inevitable was cheerfully accepted; and the presence of Leonard's gift in the cottage was only, on rare occasions thereafter, recalled by the Red Indian,

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or the pirate, or the grim general, in an impassive, or hectoring, or stern, command to some underling to "Set up the magic ladder!" . . .

School days came, at length, to an end; and Alan joined Mr. Fuller, the grocer, as errand-boy.

Not long after this event, succeeded another.

Mrs. Porter's heart, long protesting against the onus of vitalizing that body compact with disappointment, dissatisfaction and resignation, ceased of a sudden its unequal labour, and freed the bound, cramped spirit forth to whatsoever excited adventurousness it would. . . .

Alan, now being considered of an age to look after himself, continued his scheme of existence as before. His days were filled with Mr. Fuller's behests; his evenings with his great friend Harry Weston; or with walks or reading; his nights with sleep. . . .

A month passed in this business. No faintest thought came to him of the stored gifts of his wandering, scarce-remembered brother. The dark recesses of the bedroom cupboard remained as ever: secret, and one with the jealous darkness. The old curiosity concerning the precise magical endowment of the magic ladder reposing in its patterned mahogany box, remained unaroused.

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It was while searching that cupboard in the hope it would reveal a long-mislaid pair of trousers, that Alan's hand, exploring far back, came in contact with a hard, jagged object. He withdrew it, and the light discovered the curious shape of the Vesuvian vase. He stared at it a moment: instinctively with that reverent regard inculcated in him by Mrs. Porter for all things Leonardian. . . . Then, in a sharp, vivid thought: remembrance returned. With a sudden intake of breath, and thereafter a firm clutching of his lower lip with his teeth: Alan rummaged swiftly. . . .

The kimono appeared; the East African mat. . . .

Ensued a breathless struggle, then his triumphant hands emerged,—trembling perhaps, but sure-fingered,—and exposed the polished mahogany box containing the magic ladder. . . .

§

And now Alan paused. He placed the box on the floor, and stared at it. He had no least experience of things magic; but he had read a certain amount: and he knew, from his reading, that the opening of sealed bottles or locked boxes, and affording release to whatsoever magic com-

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prised their contents,—was not invariably fraught with good fortune for the operator. There crowded into his mind a medley of recollections: the unfortunate Pandora; the no-less unfortunate fisherman who netted a centuries-long sealed jar. . . . Leonard's warning; and his mother's determination to leave well alone. . . .

Then he argued: Leonard must have opened it; and apparently no harm had assailed him. And if no harm then, why harm now? . . . Then his imagination presented him again with the dozen theories concerning the Ladder's exact magical properties. Which one was right? Or were they all wrong? Or all right, in some magnificent manner? . . .

He was really only indulging in the sweets of anticipation. While he allowed a thrill of exquisite fear to pass thro' him; while he argued, seeking justification; while he conjectured on the unknown nature of the Ladder;—he knew that soon he would inevitably act: apply the key, lift the lid, and obtain answer to his curiosity. . . .

He picked up the key, and fitted it into the lock: it entered smoothly. . . .

As he did so, a thin clear whistle from outside, made him hesitate. The whistle was a

THE LADDER

pre-arranged signal: and indicated the waiting presence of Harry Weston at the gate.

Alan's first thought was to ignore the signal—to pretend he was not at home—to keep the secret of the mahogany box to himself.

Then the well-known uncertainty attached to concern with all things magical, made him consider the undoubted advantages of a companion. . . .

The whistle sounded again: thinner and clearer.

Alan made up his mind suddenly. Shrilly he answered the signal, and went to the window:

"Hey, Harry! Come on in."

A year younger than Alan; sturdy and unimaginative: Harry entered:

"What're you doing? Let's go out for a walk."

"Not to-night. What d'you think this is?"

But Harry didn't rise to the occasion. He looked at the box carelessly, then away.

"I don't know. Just a box, I suppose. . . . Come on: a walk."

Such indifference invited the shock of the dramatic. Alan bestowed it.

"Harry," he said solemnly; "You'd never guess. It's the most wonderful thing. My brother Leonard sent it. It's a magic ladder."

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Harry stared at his friend, then at the box. His slow mind reached leisuredly up to the idea.

"Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly. I don't know more than that. But now I'm going to open it, and see."

"Not in here, are you?"

"Why not?"

"O, I don't know. Let's take it outside."

Alan gave in. "All right." A vague conviction seized him that there was sense in the idea. There was a field beside the cottage, and thither the box was carried.

"Now," said Alan, "here goes! Anything might happen."

His mind dilated. Harry, on his knees, moved back a little, his eyes absorbedly fixing the box.

Alan reached out his hand cautiously, and turned the marble key—The lid sprang back, there was a sharp staccato rattling, a sudden rushing,—and out of the box leapt a rope-ladder and reared perpendicularly its length into the sky. Up it shot—there seemed no end to it: the box held an inexhaustible Ladder. Already the beginning was out of sight, and still the upward rush continued. The astonishing speed, the astonishing height! The sudden surprise of the thing!

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The eyes of both Alan and Harry grew round as they stared up at the magical thing they had loosed. Their mouths flatteringly emulated their eyes, and achieved a similar roundness. They said nothing: held dumb by the sight. . . .

Abruptly, the sharp staccato rattling, the sudden rushing, ceased. The mahogany box was empty at last. The magic ladder swayed gently to and fro: one end apparently caught, and at rest, on some dizzy, remote ledge in the sky; the other lightly brushing the blades of grass this way and that with its bottom rung.

§

In all their games together: it was Alan who commanded and led, Harry who obeyed and followed. But now, despite Alan's long and careful training of him, Harry protested against his superior's judgment and decision.

"No, don't go up," he begged. . . .

Not for nothing was Alan the son of his mother. That certain streak of adventurousness that Mrs. Porter, no doubt, had succeeded ultimately in subduing, and excluding from her actions, was an inherent part of her spirit: and she had communicated it first to Leonard, with

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what result, we know; and second, to Alan: with a result we are about to see.

If only Mrs. Porter's heart had endeavoured a space longer, that she might have lived to witness this moment! it is not too much to suggest that she had admitted Alan into that deep beyond the deep that existed in her bosom: till now the sole province of Leonard. To Alan would she unhesitatingly extend now those hitherto-reserved furnishings: the finer fineness, the more tender tenderness;—her adventurous spirit acknowledging, with pride and ecstasy, its kind. Alas! she had failed to read in his early activities as Red Indian, pirate, and general, a definite tendency to this supreme moment. . . .

He smiled at Harry's serious expression and earnest request. Why, all his life he had longed for just such an adventure; and here it was, miraculously offering itself to him.

Giants, witches? Dangers, evil? What cared he? His heart beat quickly. O, this was life at last! Real life! . . . His imagination began a riotous search for the possibilities that awaited him at the Ladder's top. . . .

He waved to Harry, and started to climb. Up, up. . . . He must not look down: he might

THE LADDER

turn giddy. . . . The air grew colder. . . . His eyes sparkled with his thoughts; his blood swept thrillingly thro' him. Adventure indeed !

§

The dusk: a mass of grey, shadowy motes that imperceptibly at first mingled with the high clarity of light, then thickened gradually: had already begun when Alan left the earth. The white, faint disc of the moon waxed slowly luminous. And now the few, large stars appeared, that could vie with their light against the potent moon's. . . . Still a late blackbird sang from some invisible coign in the valley: delicate sad trills whose echoes seemed to linger throbbingly on the quiet air. . . .

Harry remained crouched by the foot of the Ladder: every now and then glancing upward. He had watched his friend till the blue air became to his eyes black-tinged: an encroaching mist of moving black circles hid him for a moment, then disclosed him, hid him . . . with an effort, disclosed him, and then, finally, wrapped him away.

The agitation of the seemingly-flimsy rope-ladder, great at first, gradually diminished;

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became after a space, a slight tremor; then ebbed by degrees to a vibration only to be felt by the finger-tips. . . .

The dusk yielded to darkness: the evening to night. . . . And the blackbird yielded at length to the oppression of silence. . . .

Harry awaited the return of his friend with lessening patience. He rose and grasped the sides of the Ladder, and shook. Then he called: "Alan!" and "Alan!" Louder: "Alan!" It seemed to him that his voice lifted up only to be beaten back by the darkness; that his friend was remote: higher than his voice could reach. . . .

The slow unimaginative mind began to evolve an idea. Its daring held him with a fearful fascination. All his life, Harry had owned Alan his greatest friend. Not only Alan's advantage of a year in life, but also his vivid, leaping mind, his eager imagination, exercised their sure power over the younger boy. Alan planned, Harry executed. Alan,—as has been remarked,—commanded and led, Harry obeyed and followed. The years had bred their strong feeling of devotion, and sturdy attitude of loyalty in Harry toward his friend.

Now, as he waited: his heart began to grow

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troubled with fears for Alan's safety. The ever-present emotions of devotion and loyalty, stirred easily, asserted themselves. And thus the idea, in all its daring, was evolved.

"If he's not down soon," he said aloud, "I'll go up after him."

He waited, watching the Ladder for signs betokening a descent. But the Ladder remained perfectly stationary.

He called again: "Alan!" Again: "Alan!"

He walked about restlessly.

"If he's not here by the next chime of the church-clock," he delivered his ultimatum, "I'll chase up." . . .

His mind was filled only with the thought of his friend; it had no wonder for what ascent of the Ladder would reveal. . . . He tried to blame himself for letting Alan go; but knew, quite well, Alan would have ignored him entirely, no matter what persuasion he urged. . . .

The eight notes of the half-hour broke into the silence like so many pebbles dropped into the placidity of a pond.

At once Harry grasped the Ladder-sides with firm hands and began to climb. The phlegmatic lines of his sturdy young body: the phlegmatic

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nature of his movements: betokened the type of unremarkable mind he possessed;—capable of any greatness when actuated by such unreasoning emotions as it now was: the twinned ones of devotion and loyalty.

§

The sole inn of Finchincombe was "*The Golden Bell*."

In the dim 30's, some wag had obliterated the top and bottom loops of the B, on the swinging sign that flapped at the roadside, transforming it into an H: plain for all to see.

But, the inn,—one of no pretensions whatsoever,—had never had aspirations in this direction in its old Bell days; nor, since the new nomenclature, had it endeavoured to live up to its exacting title. . . .

Mr. Tedder, the landlord, was a man who spoke seldom. In his courting days: his tongue had been comparatively active; but, since his marriage, the right to such activity had been somewhat summarily questioned by Mrs. Tedder, with the result that he had peaceably waived it, and thereafter contented himself with an

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expression of grave acceptance, which he presented immovably to all that he heard and saw.

But someone in the house had to be ready of speech: and Mrs. Tedder, self-sacrificingly, took on the responsibility. Her face seemed to have been peculiarly designed for just such a vocation. The supple mouth; the elastic muscles controlling expression: of cheeks, forehead, nose and chin, all proclaimed the wisdom of Nature who foresaw so perfectly the needs of the future. Her vocabulary, not overextensive, was regularly exercised in its entirety; the range of her gestures: with head and hands: admirable and definite; the speed of her easily-slipping sentences, amazing. Her mastery over her vocal cords was, of course, the attainment of long practice;—it was an instruction to note the changes in her volume differentiating remarks to her husband, exhortations to the cow, admonishments to the poultry, and pleasantries to the customers. . . .

The single parlour adjoining the taproom was a cheerful room with its beams and sporting-print-covered walls, its generous stove, and its three inglenooks.

These inglenooks not uncomfortably contained the customers, who, tonight, as ever, comprised

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Mr. Bennett, the bootmaker,—like the landlord, a silent man; Mr. Fuller, the grocer, who knew, by his calling, the gossip of the whole village, and who loved to spread it abroad with comments of his own, and suggested explanations; Mr. Bright, the blacksmith,—who was a pessimist; Corporal George Brown, an old soldier,—who always drank his beer immediately after holding-forth,—with fierce-muttered remarks beforehand into the secrecy of his wire-like, outstanding moustaches,—and as tho' the beer were a brew of his worst enemy's blood; four farmers: Messrs. Giddings, Westrup, Thompson and Edwards, and, finally, the One Man Who Never Worked. . . .

The laws of the land so incomprehensibly differing,—as since time immemorial,—from the inclinations and desires of the people of the land: the company rose to depart to its several homes on the strokes of ten o'clock. Mr. Tedder lingered at the door, with valedictory greetings, then, on the summons of his wife, locked up slowly and saw to the extinguishing of the lamps. . . .

The company, gently garrulous, proceeded along the High Street, and chanced to turn in a body to the left, by the pump. Fronting them

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now, lay the field against the Porter cottage; and clear to their gaze in the moonlight the dependent Ladder in the field's midst. They all saw it.

"Ah-h," said Mr. Fuller, gravely, breaking the sudden silence.

"What ! a ladder ?" exclaimed Corporal Brown, puffing his cheeks enormously, so making his thick moustaches extend outward and bristle menacingly: as tho' he expected the immediate result to be an instant surrender and withdrawal of the Ladder.

"It tides no good, being there," groaned Mr. Bright.

The four farmers looked at it doubtfully.

"I—say !" remarked the One Man Who Never Worked: who seldom had more than this to offer; and who then retired into a studious contemplation of the phenomenon.

"How did it get here ?" asked one of the farmers practically.

Nobody knew for certain at once; but theories were soon forthcoming.

Mr. Fuller, with the portentous air he assumed on being told a county-scandal, nodded his head slowly, then said:

SILVER NUTMEGS

"They be ve-ry clever, indeed; but I'm up to their games."

He was immediately pressed for the explanation. His reputation for holding a knowledge of the inner life of the village rested upon a sure foundation. He cleared his throat, and delivered himself:

"It be one o' them there h'artful advertising dodges—"

Two of the farmers cocked an eye knowingly, and nodded. One of them interposed:

"What they calls up in Lunnon a 'stunt.'"

"A stunt, it be. A h'advertising stunt, you take it from me, I *know*. I *know* their ways, I do. The '*Morning Mail's*' always at it; so's the '*Morning Express*.' Mr. Fuller's imagination soared on the wings of his triumph. He essayed a daring height. "Once, there was a dead man, *and* a dead woman, found;—" He broke off, and glanced at his listeners darkly. "If I chose to speak," he hinted. "The '*Morning Mail*' was at the bottom o' that". . . .

All eyes stared from the speaker to the Ladder: half-expecting to see it throng, like a new Jacob's Ladder, with dead men and women.

"It looks bad to me," growled Mr. Bright.

THE LADDER

"It might have somethin' to do with this 'ere Daylight Saving Act," suggested the tallest of the farmers, Mr. Giddings: for whom all the evils heaped on our wretched earth were accounted by the Act.

"Ay," agreed his neighbour, Mr. Westrup; who always agreed with him.

Mr. Bennett said nothing, but craned his neck and stared up the height of the Ladder speculating on the remoteness of its top. To him it seemed to plunge straight into the moon. He offered diffidently the result of his researches to his friends.

"It 'ppears to lead to yon moon."

This observation added a new terror to their minds. Mr. Thompson gripped it first, and gasped:

"What if folks from the moon be a-comin' down with all sorts of dev'lish things, to smash up everything? . . ." Then, a sudden, sinister thought: "What if they be down already?" Cold shivers glissaded down several backs at the horrible picture that sprang into vividness on the walls of their minds.

Corporal Brown puffed noisily into the silence. His great moustaches flapped about his mouth like immature wings.

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"I'm going up," he snapped. "Now then—" his years fell from him; he was on parade once more. Unconsciously, he stood stiffly to attention, and assumed his parade-ground bellow—"Who volunteers to go with me? Maybe, England's in danger of invasion; and it's the duty and privilege of every subject to fight—" The Corporal's long service, at home and abroad; recollections of his commanding officers' speeches; of newspaper tags and national slogans; of his own desultory reading, came to his aid. He ended his peroration on a genuinely eloquent note: "—for Freedom, Justice and the Right; for God, Empire and the King."

Mr. Bright was the first to step forward. He drew up his hard figure, his chest swelled, his arms, within the confines of his sleeves, knotted mightily: his usual preparation beside his forge for a long assumption of the four-pound hammer.

"Don't s'pose we'll ever get back," he remarked gloomily, aside.

Mr. Bennett joined him, with a nod to the Corporal.

"Of course," he murmured. His eyes attempted to measure the distance to the moon.

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His mind considered his occupation with a faint interest. . . .

The smallest, stoutest of the farmers, Mr. Thompson, reluctantly took his place with the group.

"Well?" The Corporal boomed belligerently at the remaining members. . . .

"What I say is,—it's no invasion from the moon," declared Mr. Giddings with conviction. "It be that there dratted Daylight Saving curse."

"Ay," agreed Mr. Westrup.

"But," continued Mr. Giddings after a pause; "I be so durned tired o' that curse, that I be going up to see if I can do aught to get rid o' it."

Mr. Westrup looked startled by his friend's decision; then hastily chimed in his accustomed "Ay," in the very nick of neighbourly decency.

"Then—stand here with us," commanded the Corporal, suddenly deflating his dangerously puffed-out cheeks. The wings flapped subsidingly. "What about you?" he asked Mr. Fuller and Mr. Edwards.

Mr. Fuller put on his dark look obstinately.

"That dead man, *and* dead woman," he said

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softly. "All caused by t' tricky '*Morning Mail*.'—A h'advertisng dodge,—'stunt,' that is."

The Corporal was not, however, to be side-tracked.

"You're not coming?" he challenged.

Mr. Fuller sighed.

"We'll only be made fools of. You see. All England'll be laughin' at us. Big headlines, and pitchers—" He grew vague, and tailed his sentence away. Then he sighed again heavily.

"It be a shame to make an old man like me climb a ladder just to be made a fool of," he protested.

"All right, then,—stay be'ind," shouted the Corporal. "You comin', Edwards?"

But Mr. Fuller had never hurried in his life, and was not to be hurried now.

"Wait on, wait on," he said plaintively. "Who said I was goin' to stay be'ind? I didn't *say* I was. I only said it was a shame to climb this 'ere ladder simply to be made a fool of by a paper."

"Well, you can't be made more of a fool than you are already," snarled the Corporal brutally, chafing at the delay. "So you might as well come: you've nothin' to fear."

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Mr. Fuller, to the complete extent that his round, chubby face was capable, assumed a hurt look.

"Come on, Edwards," he said, with cold dignity. "Let's go and become fools;"—then a gentle bitterness, a calm resignation entered his tone,—“And let's have all England laugh at us.”

The Corporal stared at the One Man who Never Worked.

"Hey, Mister!"

The One Man Who Never Worked emerged from his attitude of studious contemplation of the Ladder, and directed his gaze at his interlocutor.

"I been thinkin'," he said simply. "This is a 'ard world; and sure-ly there be better places. Maybe the ladder leads to one on 'em? I been thinkin'," he repeated the astonishing information candidly: "I wouldn't mind tryin' me luck."

He moved over to the others.

The Corporal, content with his enlistments, surveyed the party sharply.

"Squad!" he roared;—and then remembered suddenly. His years returned to him; the old wound in his side tingled again, the excitement found him trembling; the vision of the parade-ground vanished.

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"Here," he said, gruffly; "I'll go first. Follow me carefully. Be ready for anything."

He moved over and began to ascend. The others came clumsily at first, then more easily, as their feet became accustomed to the spacing of the rungs. The One Man Who Never Worked left the ground last. . . .

"All there?" called the Corporal: some hundred feet up.

"Ay," they answered.

The air continued to echo with enquiries, answers and curses impartially. The sounds faded slowly. . . . Eventually the height secreted them, and hid their utterers. . . .

§

Less than an hour later, Mrs. Bennett anxiously made her way to the *Golden Bell*. The sight of Mrs. Fuller with Mrs. Bright and Mrs. Giddings talking excitedly at her destination roused her worst fears. She came up breathlessly.

"What's happened?" she demanded. "What's afoot? Is Bennett dead? O dear, O dear! He never could speak up for himself!"

The others, all talking at once, did their best

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to calm her with the news that they were in a like state of ignorance.

"Mr. Fuller's so easily led," moaned Mrs. Fuller. "There's nothing he wouldn't do, if only someone did it first."

She looked accusingly at no one in particular. . . .

Then Mrs. Westrup and Mrs. Thompson appeared.

"Mercy!" cried Mrs. Giddings. "The whole village!"

"I'm so frightened," whimpered Mrs. Bright. "Tom 'as always expected something like this to happen. Something dreadful. And now it has!"

"I suppose they're not still inside?" asked Mrs. Thompson.

"Let's knock. Let's see. . . . I've never heard the like in all my born days." . . .

"Lordy!" exclaimed Mrs. Tedder, shewing her head from a top window, and learning the situation. "They left here all right, punctual at ten, so they did. You saw 'em go, Jack, didn't you?"

From somewhere behind the Mrs. Tedder-blocked window, a muffled voice, recognizable as Mr. Tedder's, acknowledged the fact.

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"Well, I don't know what," confessed Mrs. Tedder: surveying the worried women: gaining much comfort from the thought that she had her own man safe anyway. . . . "Wait a moment, I'll come down."

But her presence in their midst, with Tedder for shadow,—and as speechless,—did nothing to improve matters.

Mrs. Bright and Mrs. Bennett were becoming restless. Mrs. Westrup began to cry. Mrs. Giddings muttered: "This'll be the death o' him: having that heavy cold: double *pewmonia*, mark my words. . . ."

"Look! here comes Mrs. Edwards, too," cried someone.

"Edwards, as well," observed Mrs. Bennett with some slight satisfaction. "It *is* the whole village."

Mrs. Edwards looked very pale, and her thin features were drawn into grim lines that the light of the moon accentuated.

"O, O," she moaned, "Did you see it? Didn't you see it?"

The women edged closer together, and glanced apprehensively about.

"The ladder, the terrible long ladder in the



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Porter field!" sobbed Mrs. Edwards. "O, Bob's gone up it, I know he has. . . ."

"Ladder? What ladder?" chorused the women, led by Mrs. Tedder; who immediately embarked on a solo: "A long ladder in the Porter field?"

The faithful chorus came: "A long ladder—in the Porter field?"

"We must look into this," said Mrs. Tedder, sharply, taking command.

They went straightway, in procession, along the High Street, turned to the left by the pump, and then—saw the Ladder.

Mr. Tedder, bringing up the procession's tail, evinced but little interest, and his slippers, loose on his feet, slapped the road with a melancholy sound. . . .

At once, the Ladder-end was clustered about, and examined. As everyone talked together, no one's opinions or theories were heard. . . . Mr. Tedder alone, slightly withdrawn from the centre of things, thought upon his bed with wistful longing. . . .

Then Mrs. Giddings bent down suddenly, and picked up an object from close by the Ladder.

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"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Bennett, drawing near, "it's my husband's pipe."

"He must have dropped it then," ruled Mrs. Giddings.

"Sure enough, they've all climbed up."

Once more, Mrs. Tedder's voice, (in the tone employed in exhorting the cow: the creature being at some considerable distance) rose above the less accomplished ones, and dominated them.

"We must go up the thing," she declared.

"O. Do we dare?" quavered Mrs. Westrup.

"Of course! We've a man with us;"—Mrs. Tedder, with no intention of irony, indicated her husband: apart and wistful. He looked around for a means of escape. None presented itself. He would have to go through with it.

"But I'll go first," said Mrs. Tedder. "You follow me"—her eyes fixed her husband again. "And then, say, Mrs. Giddings, then Mrs. Thompson,—then as you like."

The matter was settled. It did not even dimly occur to her masterful mind that anyone would oppose her. Nor did anyone do so.

Mrs. Tedder, garbed as she was (masterful minds being ever unconscious of trifles) led. Mr. Tedder, rapt from his thought of bed,

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followed duly; then Mrs. Giddings, muttering her burthen: "—double *pew*-monia, I know——"; Mrs. Thompson steadily climbing; Mrs. Bennett: trying to discourage her fears, but to her dismay, feeling them increase in strength; Mrs. Fuller: declaring her determination to acquaint Mr. Fuller *later* with her exact thoughts, feelings and opinions concerning him, leading her this dance, when any respectable, ordinary, God-fearing woman was sound asleep, and at peace, in her bed; Mrs. Bright, already believing the worst had occurred: Tom was dead at the top of the Ladder, —somewhere, somehow;—it was just the sort of thing that he, many times, had half-suggested would happen to him one day; and last came Mrs. Edwards: the pallor of her face rapidly being lost in the mounting flush induced by her exertion. She suddenly remembered one of her first thoughts, which had become lost in the commotion; and she called out: "We ought to 'ave gone to Parson!"

Mrs. Tedder coldly replied down: "*I'm* capable of attending to this."

And Mrs. Edwards thereupon felt she had done her duty; and that Mrs. Tedder was, indeed, quite capable of attending to the matter; though she

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was, Mrs. Edwards reflected obliquely, a Non-conformist. . . .

The Ladder bore its ascending freight with equanimity; and shortly a drifting cloud obscured it from view. . . .

§

The next morning, the children of Finchcombe awoke to an unwonted silence. Seldom was the valley much noisier than the industrious bird-life made it; but now the occasional clap of a hammer, or rattle of a bucket, or sound of a voice or footstep, was absent: and the birds maintained their customary industry unchallenged and uninterrupted.

Within the cottages: no mothers' busy hurrying to and fro; nor crackling of stove-fire; nor rattling of plates; nor delicate, appetizing premonitions of food preparing.

The sunshine crept through the windows, and lay strangely and silently in gradually-lengthening rectangles of yellow on the floor. The doors were all closed: and the stripling day knocked vainly with soft, soundless, but urgent, fingers for admittance.

The children leapt from their beds, and scam-

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pered from room to room. Wonder grew large in their minds, discovering the big double-beds undisturbed; the kitchens cold and deserted.

They called: "Mother!". . . . And went to the back-doors: "Father!". . . .

They shivered, and returned to their rooms and dressed. Something tremendous had happened. Dimly they guessed they had awakened to an extraordinary day: a day when everything familiar and commonplace had at last flung by its mask, and revealed its true astonishing strangeness. . . .

But though children think long, they seldom think far; and now their dim conjecturings were soon forced to the backs of their minds, by the pressing demands of the moment. Food was an instant necessity;—and they opened cupboards and safes, and consumed the handiest and most-compassable edibles that presented themselves. . . .

Mother and Father would soon come back, they told themselves. Some sudden call had taken them away: to a near, or maybe to a far, destination: some errand that could not wait. . . . Thus satisfied, they began to enjoy the novel situation: to revel in the adventure. . . .

The school-bell broke in on their enjoyment with its imperative summons. And if any of the

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children had half-expected that, on this uncommon, exciting day when the daily procedure,—like a piece of clockwork,—had suddenly run-down and stopped,—the institution of School would naturally have suffered a like collapse,—they were at once undeceived; and felt confirmed in their old belief that, though the end of the world should be abruptly contrived: somehow the bell for school would still ring its remorseless note, and accomplish their attendance. . . .

There was nothing for it but to snatch up their books, and obey.

Singly, in twos, in threes: they reached the pump—that central position—and gathered in a staring, noisy knot. Opposite the pump stood the school: clamouring monotonously from its slatted turret. And diagonally opposite the school stood the Porter field: displaying its motionless-hanging Ladder with an engaging plausibility that the Ladder was a rather wonderful growth it had reared; and that it was, really, in consequence, quite proud of it. . . .

Which child first decided that the astounding thing was only what was to be expected on such a day abrim with astounding things; and that the allurements of climbing into the sky: away from

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ordinary and known, to marvellous, faëry-tale, and unknown, places,—not least among the former being the unfair detention of School,—will never be told. It may have been the oldest boy, or the youngest; the cleverest, or the dullest; the most imaginative, or the least.

Whichever it was, he gave a sudden shout, and began running: over the road, over the field, toward the Ladder. Reaching it, he turned bright-faced on his fellows with a whoop:

“Come on! I dare you! Follow my leader!”

He flung down his bundle of books, and climbed.

The invitation, the challenge, may possibly have been refused, or weighed critically by less-spontaneous elders;—but not so with children. The thrill of the game seized them: they, too, disposed of their books on the grass, raced over,—and jostled, laughing and shouting, at the Ladder’s foot, for precedence. . . .

They rose quickly: a lovely, gay string of young humanity: a delightful, flower-like chain that swayed and rippled, and passed gently into the gold-blue of distance. . . .

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§

Mr. Gilthorpe's earliest recollections were inextricably bound up with the exigencies and responsibilities of Duty. He recalled his very first intimation of the universal presence of the uncomfortable virtue.—It was learning from his mother, by heart: "My duty to my neighbour—"

Later, it was learning from his father, by heart: "Stern daughter of the voice of God. . . ."

He came to acknowledge, in after life, that his father and mother had constructed a complete, austere Heaven of their own, presided over, rigidly, by their God. This heaven they had passed on, by admonition and precept, to their son. On their death-beds, each made a point of admitting that they had next to nothing to bequeath to him, save a reminder of their life-long construction: that heaven and that God. . . . But, by then, to Mr. Gilthorpe the reminder was redundant. To one Heaven he looked and aspired; to one God did he bow the knee, and live in stern austerity beneath its awful eye: the Heaven and the God of his parents. And from them would he never turn. . . .

As the years passed, Mr. Gilthorpe's idea of

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the attributes of Duty was such as to make him zealously and uncompromisingly shun with horror all that was pleasant, easy and comfortable, and become absorbed instead in all that was unpleasant, difficult and uncomfortable. The stony, merciless foot of his deity pressed on his neck; and the task of life was a sad one.

His choice of the profession of school-mastering was the outcome of a long and deep communion with Duty, who pointed the path with inexorable finger. With a grim drawing-together of all his energies: Mr. Gilthorpe has taken it. . . .

And now, as he rang the bell, he murmured morosely, from long habit, quotation of his favourite poem against the unnerving exactitudes of the opening day:

“Hold up thy banner to my failing eyes,
And let my tottering steps lead on to thee.”

Not that his eyes were failing yet: they were remarkably strong and keen for a man of his years; not that his steps were near approaching attainment of the senile quality of tottering; nor was the expression of the desire to be led to Duty (of course) anything but modesty,—Mr. Gilthorpe was long ensconced in the very holy of holies;—but there was a definite something, a melancholy,

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thrilling Something in the music of the lines that never failed in soothing and smoothing him. . . .

He looked at his watch. One minute to nine o'clock. . . . Duly for the one minute he continued to ring; then desisted, and rose.

The silence that ensued was unusual. The playground was wont to echo again with shouts and the stamp of running feet.

The silence continued: made deeper by the flight of a bee past the window; the trill of a distant thrush.

Mr. Gilthorpe frowned. In what mischief, what prank, were the children engaged now? . . .

He went to the window, and surveyed the school-ground.

Empty!

He started. His gaze sought the precincts of the pump, and the street beyond.

Deserted!

The bee had passed; the thrush had flown: the silence was intense. . . .

Mr. Gilthorpe was entirely disconcerted. He debated upon a sharp continuance of the bell, and moved to the rope. . . . His eyes glanced to the middle-distance . . . and grew ridiculous: blank,—fixed on the incredible sight it afforded:

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his pupils mounting into the upper air: the chain of them swaying, rippling: passing gently into the gold-blue of distance. . . .

Mr. Gilthorpe's long deference to Duty urged him to instant action. He uttered a mumbling cry. Clearly as at the beginning of his career: the inexorable finger pointed again, and the path it indicated was the perpendicular one of the Ladder.

Clutching up the birch,—for in his view the behests of Duty included inflictions prominently,—he ran from the room and took up an agitated stand by the Ladder, and waved the birch, and strained first of all his eyes,—trying to perceive his recalcitrant pupils; then his lungs, in shouting: “Come down! Come down at once! I forbid you to climb a step higher! Do you hear me?”

Ah, did they? No answer came; no sign of obedience.

Mr. Gilthorpe called again, till his baritone voice cracked suddenly. Reduced to speechlessness, he had more attention to bestow on the inexorable finger insisting on ascent.

“Sursum!” he ejaculated then: both as a moral and a physical ideal of action.

With the word lingering its last agreeable syllable on his lips, he took to climbing.

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Shortly, it became impracticable to carry the birch: it had to be dropped. . . . It was: with regret. . . . Admirable and rapid then his progress; and the gold-blue of distance accepted him gradually. . . .

§

It was always with some slight difficulty that the Reverend Claude Gage avoided the (in his opinion) wholly-unnecessary attentions of his housekeeper, Mrs. Skews, on those occasions when he left the Vicarage for a walk.

The good lady would lie in wait within the dark region of the stairs, or in the passage leading down to the kitchen; and would emerge suddenly (or, as he felt, positively pounce upon him) in the very instant of his exit, forbidding him:

“You can’t go out in those thin shoes, sir. You must put on your brogues.”

Charging him:

“You don’t *have* to go out this morning, sir! Such a bleak wind, it is.” . . .

Overriding him:

“Only the light coat,—and it been a black frost? I never did! Here’s your heavy one.” . . .

His murmured objections, or apologies (he

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always felt the latter were expected) would call forth a tolerant,—“ Well, it can’t be expected of you. . . . Like a child. Just like a child. And you got other things to think about. . . .”

Departure for a walk had eventually come to mean for the poor man a stealthy sidling down the hall; a cautious opening of the door, and a rapid disappearance through the garden.

In the first couple of attempts at clandestine walking, he had been careless enough to bang the door,—in his innocence thinking his leave of the house sufficient to exonerate him from Mrs. Skews’s attentions. He had been disillusioned. The lady caught him on both occasions before he had emerged into the street.

Now, at those hours invariably favoured by him for excursions abroad, she worked with but one eye on her task, and the other on the garden-gate. Sometimes, when no one was in sight, he broke into a hurried trot, and thus escaped: this was seldom practicable however: someone always seemed to be passing at the moment.

He had studied the whole matter patiently. For a space, he took to considering the weather carefully, and selecting his clothes to consort with it. Despite the fact of his undoubted possession

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of intelligence: the candid Mrs. Skews never saw eye to eye with him; and eventually he definitely abandoned his efforts. . . .

He thought that he had succeeded brilliantly this morning. His covering of the hall had been absolutely noiseless; his quiet shutting of the door, masterly; his pass through the garden: in speed one with the deer. Nevertheless, an ominous sound from the rear of the house warned him of a probable pursuit. He hastened along: feeling his long stride standing him in good stead. Nor did he slacken at all: when he stopped, he stopped suddenly, and stood for a while immovable. Then his lips twitched, and a scarcely audible murmur escaped:

“Jacob’s Ladder! But—surely!” . . .

Then he approached, and extended a hand. . . . Ah, it was indeed real. . . . What heavenly traffic had used it? What gift of the Deity was here? . . . His thoughts leapt wildly; his heart quickened. . . .

Now, for the Reverend Claude Gage, the age of miracles had never passed; it was every age: it was the present age. He was indeed a child: Mrs. Skews had spoken a deeper truth than she had guessed. . . . A beneficent Deity, in the

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light of the Vicar's belief, was constantly offering opportunities: a magnificent shower of them! but, truly, only for such as had eyes to see, who had ears to hear.

This Ladder—might it not be one of those opportunities? Might it not even be, for him, *the* opportunity?

Let him consider well. Let him even try to be dispassionate. . . .

A ladder: what nobler symbol? implying, of necessity, a beginning, a labour, an end. Denoting ascent. Rung by rung: slow progress: upward.

This especial Ladder: resting, one end on the earth, the other apparently on the very bosom of Heaven! Signifying thus, plainly, a renunciation of earth, and things earthly; an assumption of Heaven, and,—surely,—things spiritual! . . .

The proper quotation for the occasion offered itself; was accepted and murmured:

“ . . . men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.”

This urged the instant question: If he ascended, could he with truth, say that he did so, by virtue of a dead self?

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He pondered the problem. . . . Yes; he could. Definitely, he felt that, since he had come upon this Opportunity, he had died and been born again.

“‘To higher things,’” he repeated slowly, with an ecstasy of satisfaction.

Then, with an incoherent prayer breathed forth, he began the task of the assumption of things spiritual. . . .

The perfection of the moment: its glorious unity of renunciation and regeneration: was marred by a sudden sound of hurrying feet, and the well-known free breathing of Mrs. Skews. The Vicar, in his assumption of a more rapid pace upward toward the things spiritual, forgot the closing phrases of his prayer, and ended it with an abrupt “Amen” hissed from between his clenched teeth. . . .

Mrs. Skews, seeing her master engaged physically on an undertaking she had always understood to be confined to the spiritual, gave a breathless exclamation, and looked at the ever-lengthening distance that separated him from her ministrations.

“He may know how to care for the soul,” she affirmed to herself again; “but he don’t know what to do for the body, bless him !”

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She called to him, and waved the muffler she held:

"You must put on your muffler, sir! This *bad* wind! . . ."

But the Vicar did not pause nor reply.

"O dear!" groaned Mrs. Skews. "And I never *was* no good with ladders and such like."

But the occasion brooked no delay. The Vicar persisted, and so did the bad wind. . . .

Mrs. Skews, with that grim devotion which she possessed in abundance, and which could be so very often embarrassing,—not to mention, tiresome,—began her pursuit. . . .

§

Police-Constable William Johnson possessed many noteworthy and curious characteristics, but their chief was an unflinching optimism. From his large sense of his importance might he be conceivably moved on occasion; from his general pomposity might he be loosed temporarily;—the sense of his importance and his aspect of pomposity being but properly becoming to the sole representative of the Law in Finchincombe;—but from his optimism might he not on any consideration be enticed a step.

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The fact was all the more quaint on account of the entire lack of any grounds for the characteristic's continuance. Like one of those unnatural plants that one sees at times in suburban greenhouses, growing with grim determination on a bare board: so grew the Constable's optimism: green and prolific.—Perversely flourishing, an oasis, in a desert of barrenness. . . .

Finchincombe had known the Constable a long thirty years. Not once in all that time,—nor in his whole career,—had he effected an arrest. His sole “bag” had consisted in motorists: men (all) injudicious enough to think Finchincombe possessed no legal hand to restrain them in their exhilarating, but unlawful, lust for speed. They had been disillusioned,—and taken aback,—at the sudden emergence into the High Street of importance and pomposity in the person of the Constable; who, though he took names, addresses and numbers, with an impartial politeness and severity, yet, in the disappointment of his heart, sighed. These were little birds come into his net, and he longed, with a deep constabulary passion, for really big game. Set back for a little, his sense of importance would shrivel, his pomposity deflate. Then the moment-submerged

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optimism would fidget, would chafe, and suddenly, splendidly, rise uppermost again. Well, well! not this time, not to-day; but *some* time, yes; another day. O it would come, all right! . . .

The Constable's person gave forth, for all to see, his cheerful outlook upon life. The innocent blue eyes,—eyes of a child! were set in a head whose thoughts were few and mild: their only troublesome one being the tireless hope of the Great Arrest. The moustaches, carefully waxed, were twirled ever so slightly up: sign of the true optimist. His nose was small and retroussé. It seemed as though nothing about the Constable drooped: his eyes looked straight ahead, but often wandered on a survey of the sky; his thoughts were trained,—like his moustache-ends. In fact, for such as could prognosticate from details: it was very apparent that the Constable's general upward tendency would, eventually, become consummated in a complete upward levitation.

But none could possibly have guessed the exact manner in which this was to become accomplished. . . .

When the Constable left the Police Station, after breakfast, for a stroll through the village to see that all was well: his mind dallied, as ever,

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with thoughts of the Great Arrest. Of course, he would be very sorry to leave Finchincombe, and all the folk: but then, there would be much in an Inspector's job in a big city to compensate him. . . . His eyes sparkled.

"*Inspector* William Johnson," he murmured, with approving pride at the sonorous roll of the title. Ah, yes, it would be fine. He'd be a man of note: in the Force, in the public's eye. . . .

The chance would come, some day. . . .

The blue eyes roved the width of the sky. . . .

It is an unfortunate thing to have to relate.—Realizing suddenly, with every thought of his mind, every fibre of his big body, that the Great Moment had at last, at last arrived,—and proceeding, at the double, towards the Porter field,—his eyes never for an instant releasing sight of the Ladder: the Constable tripped over the gutter-edging and fell sprawling ignobly in the very centre of the High Street.

In such fashion, then, do men approach their Great Moments.

Importance and pomposity lay for a moment helpless and ludicrous: then were hastily retrieved, and the advance continued,—slightly gaspingly.

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No Constable ever yet approached the scene of an arrest, minus his importance, or disregarding pomp. . . .

His first instinctive movement, on having arrived, was to draw out his note-book. He glanced around, he glanced up. Then, pencil-end in mouth, considered deeply. . . .

To him, of course, a ladder,—especially a rope-ladder,—signified but one thing: the presence of a thief, or thieves. And that blessed presence signified gloriously, an Arrest: indeed, the Great Arrest!

His heart sang, but he checked it with an official: "Now then!"

In the note-book he entered the date and the time; circumstance of discovering the Ladder: its exact location; and his suspicions. . . .

He walked about the Ladder, examining the ground minutely. It obligingly yielded the mahogany box, Mr. Gilthorpe's birch, Mr. Bennett's pipe, and the children's books. These were noted down immediately; and the blue eyes clouded.

Suspicions leapt actively about in the optimistic mind. . . .

Again the pencil-end sought the mouth: stroked

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the waxed moustaches to a more acute angle of aspiration.

Then he wrote: "Ascended to make investigation at—" he looked at his watch: "9.47 a.m."

Thus did the Constable fulfil his destiny: after long years of seeking to rise in the world, he at length did so, literally. . . .

§

As a searchlight, straying momentarily from its one duty of focussing its objective, will suddenly pick out and display to the vulgar gaze some quite irrelevant thing,—such as an advertisement-hoarding, or a wandering pair of closely-interlocked lovers;—so did Publicity mischievously select from his environing obscurity, a gentleman named Mr. Pogson, and flashed his unassuming name, and his amazing discovery, to the four ends of the earth.

Mr. Pogson, a commercial traveller, intent on a nearby town, chanced to pass through Finchcombe. At least, his intention was to pass through it eventually: reached there, he was assailed with a troublesome thirst,—which is not confined solely to commercial travellers,—and drew up his car at "*The Golden Bell*" to dispose of it.

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The hour was close on noon, and the inhospitable doors refused him entrance. . . .

And then,—as he explained,—a curious feeling came over him. The extreme silence of the place; the absence of any villagers, of any sound betokening their presence;—gradually entered into his consciousness; and, at length, he walked down the High Street and knocked at a door . . . at every door. He turned to the Police Station, to the Post Office. . . .

Not till he had quite satisfied himself that the village was abandoned, did he come on the Porter field, and the Ladder. . . .

Now, Mr. Pogson was a business-man. His firm,—Dipple, Wade and Dunn,—had never encouraged deviations from the narrow path of service, nor did it seem at all likely to Mr. Pogson that they would in this instance,—even though, as seemed to him most extremely likely, an entire village had, for unknown reasons, seen fit to embark on a climb to the sky.

His time was strictly scheduled; and he was due at Wenley-on-Yarrow at twelve-thirty. . . .

Thought of explaining to Mr. Dunn:—"so I climbed up, sir. You see, the *whole* village. . . . Three hours, sir, I'm afraid " . . . sent pre-

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monitory stabs of dismay into his heart. Mr. Dunn would be brief, and to the point: "I was not aware that the sky was included in your territory, Pogson. Maybe some other firm controls it. You had better join that firm—in a fortnight from now". . . .

No, no!

Thus Mr. Pogson re-entered his car, and hastened to Wenley-on-Yarrow: his thirst unsated,—and the more troublesome; his mind whirling thoughts of his discovery this way and that, and making chaos of them.

At Wenley, he told the Police-Sergeant, then hastened on to his appointment. . . .

Then events happened rapidly.

Brief fame was Mr. Pogson's portion; and thereby he gained a lasting respect-of-curiosity from not only Mr. Dunn, but also from Mr. Dipple and Mr. Wade. In the public eye, he strutted his little moment: a startling figure, hand to mouth, exclaiming an astonishing intelligence,—then he was crowded from view. . . . His proper mantle of obscurity wrapped him again; but he lived to an extreme old age, and his great comfort in those unending days was the unwearied repetition of his Discovery. . . .

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That the village of Finchincombe was indeed abandoned, and that the Ladder was indeed mysterious: the Wenley police duly ascertained. Then, the true enormity of the case dazing the local mind: Scotland Yard was urgently informed; and Scotland Yard appointed that a constable be stationed against the Ladder, guarding it, and closely keeping watch in case of any descents,—until such time as an enquiry could be instituted. . . . The evening papers appeared with page-wide headlines, and a sensation was satisfactorily effected. Editors the world over rubbed their hands together and chuckled, and lounged back in their spring-chairs, and smoothed their hair, and patted their waistcoats—if they knew anything about the public, here was a “story” that would *really* grip them, and make them sit up! And it seemed to promise to be a proper, long serial, too! . . .

§

Questions were asked repeatedly in the House. The member whose constituency contained Finchincombe became, suddenly, a very busy man. . . .

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The more feverish of the papers waxed melodramatic; the more serious debated the amazing problem earnestly. But all were baffled. All owned the fact. Theories were put forward, and theories. But none covered all the points: of how the Ladder came to be where it was; of where it led; of—; of . . .

Imagination was defeated. . . .

If it was true, then,—as was the only conclusion to be made,—that the village had ascended,—it must, one day, descend. Surely? In this belief, a number of people formed themselves into a watch committee; and kept, with the constable in charge, a tireless vigil.

But no one descended. Unobstructed, day and night after day and night, the Ladder swung gently to and fro, depending lightly: brushing the grass and the daisies,—until, at length, stakes were driven into the ground, and the Ladder's end lashed to them firmly. . . .

From every part of the country, people came to look at the curiosity: continued to come, and to come in increasing multitudes.

A high wall was built about the Ladder, and a temporary room, also, at its spiked gate, to house the guardian constable. . . .

THE LADDER

The Government started at last to move in the matter. Urged by the Press, it began consideration. . . .

An airman sought, in a powerfully-engined biplane, to probe the secret of the Ladder's top. But, though he took a goodly supply of oxygen, he was forced to descend after a gallant attempt: the Ladder, when he desisted, appearing still apparently topless. . . .

Then, a month later, a Royal Commission was appointed to sit on the matter. The Commission resolved itself into a Committee, and three Sub-Committees. . . .

All the Commissioners were busy men: they had other work to accomplish beside the Enquiry. They decided to meet fortnightly, as Sub-Committees; and in the first week of the month as Full Committee, to consider the reports of the Sub-Committees all together. . . .

So time passed. . . .

§

The traffic to Finchincombe became so heavy that, at last, yielding to the inevitable, the Railway Company granted the village a station.

SILVER NUTMEGS

Caprice of time-and-circumstance brings about its just revenge: the station was the largest on the line, and this (such a jest!) for an entirely uninhabited village!

Map-makers, of the less-conscientious type, were forced to locate the place on their maps,—and did so reluctantly; the more meticulous ones shewing it a large black square: a denotation hitherto reserved only for proud cities. The new Baedeker devoted an entire page to Finchcombe, and starred it as “of exceptional interest, and should, on no account, be missed.”

The annual American invasion duly besieged the place, and stared and drawled a while, then hastened on. . . .

As the months passed, and the Commission still held its sessions, and gave out no news to the public: at first the Press ran leaders on the dilatoriness of the Government,—inept as ever in a crisis; (the present matter was raised, by general consent, to the status of a crisis); these dwindled in length,—though not in strength of vituperation;—and became, shortly, sub-leaders.

One daily paper, from a fallen state of flickering, burst of a sudden into urgent flame: and ran an insistent campaign. Unavailingly. The Commis-

THE LADDER

sion sat on: fortnightly, and monthly: regularly, imperturbably: considering and considering. . . .

Public interest cannot maintain its high pitch when events decrease, then cease to happen, in a topic put forward for notice. Thus, publicity of the Mysterious Ladder sank insignificantly to a small daily paragraph, conveying the dismal, and helpless, tidings of the total lack of any least advance made towards solution. . . .

§

Twenty-two months and five days after Mr. Pogson's famous discovery, the Royal Commission intimated it had concluded its enquiries, and tabled its long-awaited Report.

The Report was of prodigious length: some eighteen hundred pages. Indeed, it was plain for the world to see that the Commissioners had most painstakingly approached their task, and exhausted it thoroughly before taking their leave.

The public rose to the occasion, as the public will always rise. The Press became, once more, absorbed in the revival of the sensational affair,—to such an extent that a murder, taking place in the same week that the Commission tabled its Report,—and containing many details of the

SILVER NUTMEGS

lurid, passionate kind so dear to the British Public's heart,—was actually relegated to the "*Business Investments*" and "*Stock Exchange News*" page.

His Majesty's Stationery Office duly published the Report,—printed, for convenience, on India paper;—and, to nobody's surprise, the volume became the week's "best-seller." One week's? The sales leapingly increased, and a month later, the Report was still "best-seller". . . .

But, divested of its long-winded trivial evidence, of its intricate argument and reasoning, of its involved raising, and disposal, of many theories: the final, and sole, recommendation of the Commission was simple and stark with the simplicity and starkness of the obvious: it advised that some trustworthy servant of the Crown ascend the Ladder, equipped for all possible emergencies, and investigate. . . .

The Government signified its approval; and the trustworthy servant was immediately selected. . . .

§

The ascent was to take place at two-thirty.

All through the night, crowds arrived at Finchincombe and filled the village. With dawn

THE LADDER

and early morning, the arrivals became trebled. By noon, the surrounding hills were black with the human covering. Several opportunists had erected booths in the village, and about it: side-shows, stalls of fruit and sweets; of refreshments. Not surprisingly, the pressure of the crowd collapsed them while it was still night, and trampled the fragments under-foot.

Sharply at two-thirty, there was a stir about the Ladder's end. The guardian constable saluted his superior, and, drawing from his pocket a key, unlocked the spiked gate in the enclosing wall.

It was a solemn moment. The great crowd, hitherto murmurous as a summer sea, hushed to an uncanny calm.

Press-photographers, reporters, and cinematographers alone concerned themselves with movement and busyness.

The trustworthy servant approached, passed through the gate, and took up his stand by the Ladder. He held the pose a moment; then, the photographers nodding, turned to obtain his final instructions.

It was remarked that the last confabulation, in low tones, was conducted with impressive earnestness.

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Then came the farewell: five gentlemen and one lady shook the trustworthy servant briefly by the hand, uttered some heartening words, then retired.

He advanced easily, gripped the Ladder's sides firmly, and with a slight spring, took the first step up. . . .

A sharp, swift-swelling murmur escaped from the intent crowd, and rose to a roar of surprise and stupefaction; of disappointment.—The Ladder, long-exposed, had for some time contracted a secret alliance with Decay. And now, at the sudden weight of the first step,—it published its contract: tumbled down its whole enormous length: a wreckage of rungs and ropes: tumbled, and piled its mass high: burying the disconcerted trustworthy servant. . . .

THE RIVER
AND THE ROAD

THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

OF course, the River had always been there: winding down from the innermost gully of the dim blue hills to the sea. The Road was only a few hundred years old. As a Path, it could lay claim to a greater antiquity; yet, even tracing it back to its far birth as a Track: it could not pretend to rival the august age of the River.—Not that it wished to do so: they were devoted friends: understanding and loving each other with a rare completeness. They had so much in common. To begin with: they were always together: the whole way from the hills to the sea,—where the River wound, the Road wound; where the River went straight, the Road did the same. And, for their long course, only a narrow, sparsely-wooded thicket separated them. Through its thin growth they could see each other plainly, and converse without difficulty. . . . Then, they were both dreamers. For hours at a

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time they would be silent: rapt in the delight of their dreams. The River was always engaged with the thought of the Sea toward which it hastened: the great, changing-hearted Sea: now mild, with wind-wakened ripples everywhere: like sudden delightful wrinkles on a smiling face; now smooth and composed as a sheet of blue silk; now mighty with god-like wrath: tossing thunderous mountains of water to right and left: in league with the vengeful sky. Great, changing-hearted Sea! now like an immense sparkling sapphire, now like a still emerald cored with light, and now like a mysterious moonstone. . . . And the River thought of the many great ships that flew to and fro on their wide, white wings from wonderful country to wonderful country; and it hastened on, thinking exultantly: I shall mix with the Sea; and on me, too, will the great ships pass. . . .

The Road dreamed solely of places and people; of the seven small villages through which it went; and of all the splendid people it had known in its life: treading with the adventurous feet, the loving feet, the vigorous feet of them. . . . Often it fell sad when someone whom it had come to love,— suddenly left it, taking another road. It would

THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

sigh with anguish, crying out to the River: Love is so cruel! Why can I not keep them walking on me forever? Always they go! What is one to do? Love is so cruel!

And the River would sigh with it, and reply: I know! I know! How often have men put forth on me in boats, with laughter and happiness, and I have come to love them, even as you, and have murmured my love to them day and night, and decked myself with my lilies, and sung to them with my reeds, begging them 'to stay with me for ever; and have floated all the red and the yellow, the blue and the white of the lilies about them, that they might be lulled by the perfume into consenting. . . . But always eventually they've gone: leaving me empty and sorrowful. . . .

Such dreamers, the two of them! . . .

Every night, out of the thicket, would come the Thicket-People,—those gay immortals to whom Sorrow is not even a name. They would draw reeds from the River's banks, and make them into pipes, and blow strange, thin music. They loved the River and the Road, and had many songs about them. Their favourite for the River told how they believed it had the Moon for its source,—that it was really a flowing of moonbeams. And

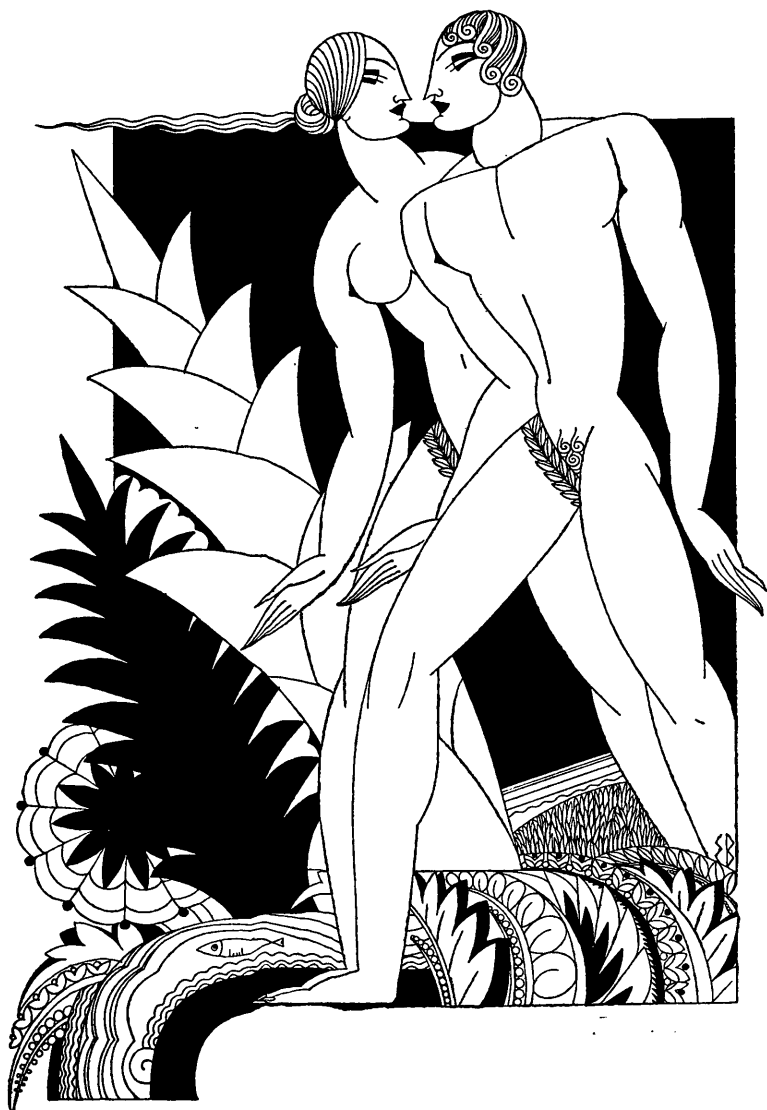
SILVER NUTMEGS

their favourite for the Road declared it consisted in crushed stars,—so whitely and crisply it always sparkled. . . . Now they would splash and toss in the River, now dance their rings on the Road, or dart to and fro like bright shadows through the leafage of their thicket. . . .

Because they were ardent dreamers: the River and the Road had many sorrows born of their dreams: delicate butterfly-like sorrows that fed from the flowers of desire their single day, then died to give place to new ones on the morrow. But in the midst of this winged crowd, lived a Lasting Sorrow that grew daily, and daily more and more possessed itself of the minds of the River and the Road, and trampled their peace and content under its ruthless feet.

Long ago it had come to them, and at the time it had seemed not to be half so important as any one of the smaller of their transient griefs. And they had expected it to remain but a little while, then go; but it had remained and remained: the weeks went over; the years: decades and then scores; and slowly they had come to realize that the sorrow was an Abiding Sorrow.

How small, beside, appeared their dream-grieving! and how difficult it was to delight



THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

thoroughly in the Thicket-People any longer. The Abiding Sorrow became a part of them.

It had come about in this wise—

Long ago, when the Road had just grown out of its track-hood, a man and a woman had paused for a moment in their walk; and the man had remarked out of a short silence:

“How like a serpent is the river!”

And the woman had answered:

“Yes. And the road: like a ribbon.”

Then they had passed on.

The same afternoon, another man and woman had appeared: and it happened again: the woman likening the River to a serpent; and the man the Road to a ribbon. . . . In the dusk, the River and the Road, not used as yet to many men and women, had commented on the two sets of remarks.

“Are they always going to say the same things?” wondered the Road, uneasily.

“Surely not,” murmured the River;—nevertheless, with a qualm at heart.

But, in the following week, it happened three times. . . . That was the beginning. In the first month: they counted fourteen times. In the second: eighteen. So it went on. The same

SILVER NUTMEGS

people, or different people: they made the same remarks—always the River was like a serpent, the Road like a ribbon. . . .

No wonder that, as the scores of years passed: the little sorrow that had seemed so weak and timid to the River and the Road, had become so strong and ruthless,—an Abiding Sorrow. . . . No wonder their dreams proved only a semi-refuge: for hardly ever would they pass through into that shining land where the dreams waited, but

“—like a serpent——”

“—like a ribbon——”

they would be dragged back to reality, to wince in the presence of the Abiding Sorrow. . . .

They had long since told the Thicket-People, who had tried very hard to understand, but because they were of the gay immortals, the name of Sorrow fell on their ears only like a jangle of harsh bells,—and they had laughed at once and begged the River and the Road never to speak like that again. “If you wish to ring bells with words,” they said, “then ring the deep-golden bell of Joy; or the silver peal of Gladness; or the tinkling diamond carillon of Happiness.” . . .

Then they had laughed again, and joined hands

THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

and danced on the Road, weaving in and out of the moonbeams that came slanting through the trees of their thicket. . . .

It seemed to the River and the Road that they knew now what to expect till the end of their existence.—Always people passing the same comments on them; and always their rebellious chafing at the comments.

Many hours of the day and night they spent sighing together; and often enough the gaiety of the Thicket-People sought in vain to defeat their sorrow. . . .

One afternoon two men came walking slowly along the Road: one was old, the other young; and the young man said at length:

“You know, the road’s exactly like a ribbon, don’t you think?”

The old man stopped, and said:

“Exactly. And the river,—look! just like a serpent.”

“I say, sir!” the young man laughed. “One almost expects to see it wriggle away!”

That evening, the River whispered excitedly through the thicket:

“Did you hear them,—those two?”

“The third time to-day,” sighed the Road.

SILVER NUTMEGS

"Yes, yes; but—the young man, you heard? he said: 'One almost expects to see me wriggle away.' Such an idea! O my friend, my dear friend, I see how we can be free!"

"We can never be free."

"Yes, so easily! Listen. It's so simple. And to think it's never occurred to us! You're like a ribbon, I'm like a serpent. Everyone says it: it's all they can ever say about us. Very well, then. Let us live up to our rôles: fully and completely. That way lies peace for us. We'll disappear. You'll roll yourself up carefully, as it behoves a length of ribbon to be rolled. I'll wriggle away—into the Sea". . . .

They did it that night.

The Road began gently and slowly at the hills, and gathered speed as it continued: rolling along like a great white wheel toward the Sea. Its momentum,—carefully judged,—took it over the couple of hundred yards of shore: and it sank with a great splash, and came to rest in a rich garden of sea-flowers.

Meanwhile, the River, with a sudden shudder from source to mouth glided as smoothly and swiftly as any serpent,—and slipped into the Sea. As it did so, it murmured over and over exultantly:

THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

"On me, too, will the great ships pass!"

And when it mingled wholly with the great Sea, it cried softly:

"Where are you, my friend, where are you?"

"Here: in this garden," answered the Road.

"Ah. Look, I have brought you my lilies: all my lilies. How many times have I longed to crown you with them, and garland you! Now, at last, I can." And it crowned the Road with its lilies, and eddied chains of them—long garlands—about it. "Now, we shall have peace. You will be happy forever in this delightful garden; and I shall be always with you. And all the time, I shall be helping the great ships above to wing to and fro."

"It is wonderful," said the Road. "We are away forever from people; and we are together."

"It is wonderful, indeed," murmured the River; and caressed the Road tenderly with its undulant, flowing greenness. . . .

The Thicket-People were amazed.

"Where are our friends? Where can they be? Here lay the Road, and there ran the River,—and they're both gone!"

There was silence for a space, then one said slowly:

SILVER NUTMEGS

"Do you remember that word they once spoke? The word that rang like a jangle of harsh bells? It was so dreadful! Like nothing we had ever heard before!"

All the Thicket-People gathered round the speaker.

"Yes, of course we remember. What of it?"

The one replied:

"I feel it's because of that word our friends are gone away."

They pondered this awhile. Then they cried:

"Why, yes! It was such a dreadful word! A jangle of harsh bells. No wonder!"

Then they broke into groups and began dancing. . . .

* * * * *

It was not very long afterwards,—two, or it maybe three, years,—men are so impatient!—that a new road was made; where the old road had been; and the flow of an adjacent river was diverted to the bed of the old one. So, to all seeming, it was as though there had never been a rebellious River That Wriggled Away, nor a rebellious Road That Rolled Itself Up.

THE RIVER AND THE ROAD

People pass by, as of old time. And, pausing, they say:

“You know, the road’s exactly like a ribbon, isn’t it?”

“Yes. And the river,—look! just like a serpent.”

THE CHIMPANZEE

ADVERTISEMENT

THE gentle reader will grant me indulgence: I have dared to add the burden of two new letters to the alphabet,—which, designed solely for human usage, is not entirely adapted to chimpanzee-speech.

The two letters are **ƒ** and **g**; their capitals respectively, **Ƒ** and **G**; and are, of course, unpronounceable by other than chimpanzees. By way of guide, however, it may be suggested that the **ƒ** is as near as possible to the letters G and Q uttered in conjunction thro' mouth and nose simultaneously; and the **g** is a moment-sustained combination of the bubbling guttural of a frog, and the sudden, sharp raucousness of a corncrake.

THE CHIMPANZEE

JUST below the Equator, not far from where the Livingstone River skirts the suddenly-subsiding Levy Hills, lay the village of Tobbe: an untidy cluster of huts: unique in that it was the only white-inhabited village in that most central region of Africa;—but, nevertheless, not to be envied on that account.

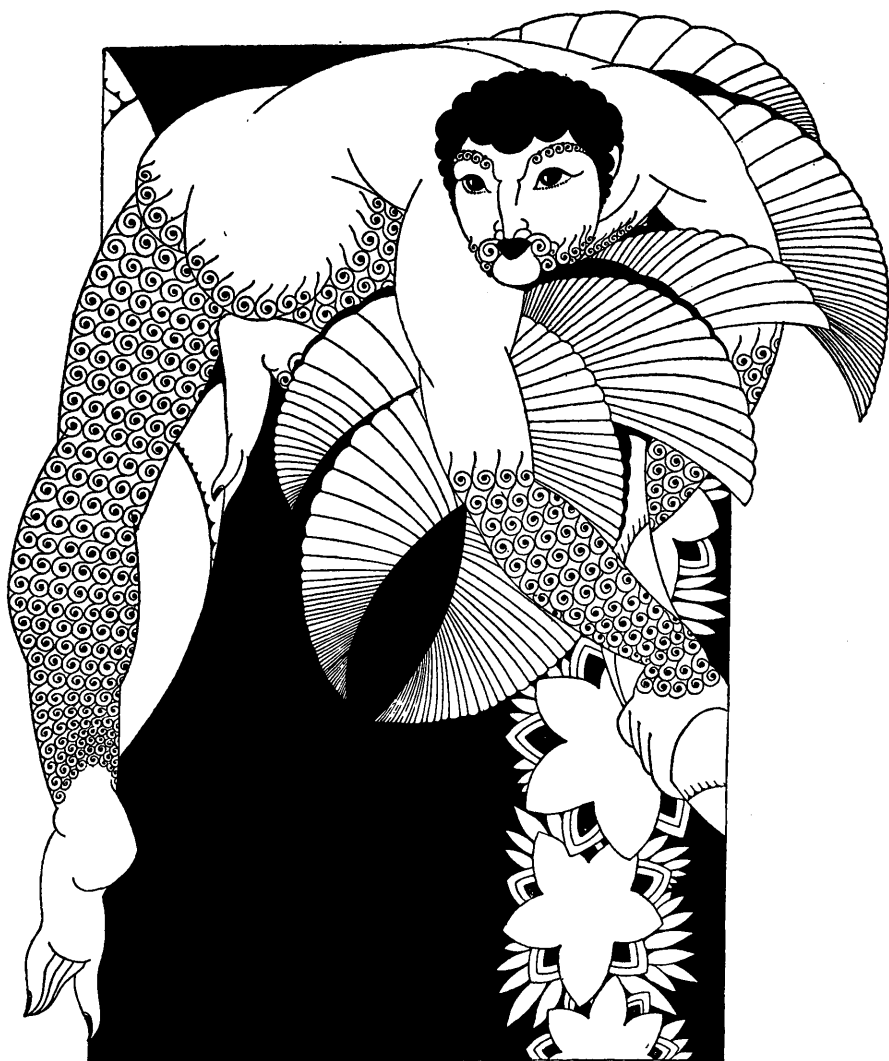
Kept, as it seemed, at an impatient distance by the snatched clearing wherein the village stood, chafed the jungle: portentous ever: ominous with its silence as with its noise: patently but temporarily deterred from indulging to the full its voracity,—presently, shortly, it would consume the impertinent clearing; absorb the insulting huts. . . .

The sixty or seventy Europeans: English, Germans, Portuguese and Dutch: that composed Tobbe, (with a like number of natives) had not with any great degree of willingness, it may

SILVER NUTMEGS

properly be inferred, chosen it for residence. Its position, climate, and general conditions militated against its choice for any other than urgent politic reasons. A brief enquiry into the past activities of its inhabitants would have revealed just such urgent politic reasons; and ones likely to remain powerful enough to hold them from ever returning to their several countries again.

The chief preoccupation of everyone in Tobbe was, of course, whisky. But Mr. Stanley Chelson, while duly subscribing to it, subscribed with only the half of his attention; the other half he gave to his chimpanzee, Teena. In the eleven years of his erratic-tempered, but painstaking, training: he had succeeded in endowing Teena with some semblance to a human being. In fact, with appreciably more semblance than one or two members of the community retained. It was not only that Teena dressed, slept and ate as a human; but also that he could fetch and carry, wash and dry dishes, sweep, and deliver messages, and so forth; and, crowning achievement of all! actually speak. It was this last accomplishment that was, by turns, Mr. Chelson's great joy and great sorrow. His joy because it was the realization of his life's one ambition; and his sorrow



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because quittance of Africa was unthinkable, and the deserved twin awards of fame and triumph, from the world in general, could never be his.

His success with Teena had been so complete: Teena! the first chimpanzee ever to talk. To think of the fortune that waited,—accruing from exhibition of him in circus and music-hall! So within reach; so beyond grasp! . . .

Only a few days before had Mr. Chelson read in a three-months'-old paper of a man with an acrobatic and juggling jaguar who was to be paid a thousand pounds a week for a world-tour. A thousand a week for that! Lord, what would they give, then, for a chimpanzee that talked?

“Ah!” he shouted suddenly.

He had crumpled up the paper with a violent hand, and, delivering at length his opinion on the ineradicable unfairness of life, had hurled a saucepan, with some accuracy of aim, at the generally-wary Teena,—then subsided into a savage fit of melancholy.

His thoughts became unbearable. To check their sharpness and bitterness, he turned soon to whisky. To forget, to forget! . . . He drank hurriedly. . . . The heavy, burning air pressed on him like an armour of heated leaden scales.—

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Pressed, and seemed to reach thro' his flesh, into his very thoughts. God, to forget! All this mess . . . this unfairness . . . a thousand a week . . . this Tobbe: it was hell. . . . He was in hell already. . . .

"Here, you, Teena! Where are you? Shew yourself—" He threw the nearest bottle. Teena dodged, but too slowly: the missile caught his shoulder, hurtled on, and smashed into tinkling pieces.

"You devil, you—!"

Mr. Chelson flung a cumbrous biscuit-tin, then a cup. . . .

Teena danced suddenly, stamping with his foot, and baring his teeth:

"Ekek! Ekek! Lapmah teep!"

The return to angry, hurt chimpanzee-language incensed Mr. Chelson beyond all control. He rushed forward, catching up a chair, intent suddenly on killing Teena.

"You miserable little brute! What're you saying? After all these years! Talk properly—!"

But Teena scrambled agilely around the table, and darted thro' the door, his voice becoming shrill:

"Pha femp len ar! Ekek! . . ."

THE CHIMPANZEE

He made swiftly off toward the jungle.

Mr. Chelson dropped the chair; stood for a moment inclined to follow, then saw the folly of the plan, and made for the whisky-bottle again. . . .

Late that night, Teena returned to Tobbe. Accustomed to his master's invariable procedure on occasions such as the present: he did not expect to find other than the hut's interior in a state of chaos, and Mr. Chelson, oblivious and stertorous, somewhere in the midst.

And it was so, once again.

Pausing for an instant on the threshold: Teena peered at the unlovely scene: the table, on its four crazy legs, a-tilt: its burden of bottles and glasses, matches, food, cigarettes and papers, scattered on the floor; most of the movable objects: chairs, bed-clothes, boxes and shelf-contents, apparently much exercised in their quality of movability: here and there, littered or piled, whole or broken; the candle guttered and extinct; and Mr. Chelson,—arms limp, legs extended, head loosely rising and falling sunk chestwards: his body sprawling in the cane-chair,—imminent on collapse to the floor.

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It was all so familiar to Teena. Yet, as he stood, he felt a twitching of disgust under his skin, his eyes half-closed, and his mouth opened slowly. He seemed to spit: hissing: his voice rising to a thin shrillness:

“Lhag na ɣeph, ten ɣvent! Hanɣt,—fal ɣm!”

Abruptly he shook himself, ambled forward, and began tidying the hut. It took him an hour. Finally, he threw a blanket over his unconscious master, then crept into a corner, and waited for him to awaken.

This occurred shortly before noon; and it was a grim and taciturn, a shaky and aching Mr. Chelson that struggled from his chair, and lurched to the water-container. Observing Teena, he scowled, but said nothing; and it was not until the evening that he permitted a slight expression of his strange, but real, affection for the animal to be made in a brief couple of pats on the back. These sufficed for Teena, and he sprang clumsily about, washing and drying the dishes: singing in his rasping, guttural voice Mr. Chelson's favourite ditty:

“Two women came to an inn, O,
A night of pleasure to win, O”

THE CHIMPANZEE

He hung the cups on their hooks; piled the plates; then threw out the greasy water, and put the tin to drain on the floor.

“The men strode off with an ‘O, ho, ho!’
But the women ——”

“Shut up!”

Mr. Chelson had resumed his whisky. His old sense of grievance had slowly been mounting all the afternoon, and now, like a tide, was at the full. He was swallowing the raw spirit from a cracked tumbler greedily, as tho’, proffered to him, it might, in the caprice of an instant, be suddenly withdrawn. He had picked up the three-months’-old paper again, and alighted upon the news of the juggling jaguar.

“Damn you, shut up!” he yelled again at the silent Teena. Then he pressed both hands to his head, and began rocking to and fro.

“O God, God,” he groaned. Tears streaked his face. “Teena, here, Teena,” he called all at once in a normal voice.

Teena whimpered.

“What do you want? What do you want me for?”

“Here, old boy. Come here.”

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Teena drew unwillingly toward him, half fearfully. But Mr. Chelson looked at him from blood-shot eyes holding a shamed expression, and began to caress him.

"All right, Teena, all right. I'm not as good as you. Never was, never was. You're more a man than I. . . ."

He pushed him away at length, and poured out half-a-tumbler. Then the tears broke again.

"O God! This damned hole . . . this blasted life. . . ."

The evening ended as the previous one had. Slowly the feeling of self-pity gave way to a rising surge of rage, and Mr. Chelson was soon shouting at the walls and defying heaven and hell. The movables in the room were, to their detriment, exercised once more; and the nimble Teena, as of old, provided the vocal target. Eventually, the candle was flung, and in the immediately-ensuing darkness, Mr. Chelson subsided with incoherent oaths, and Teena made his escape.

As he headed toward the jungle, he felt that new twitching of disgust re-assail him; and he went slowly, pondering. Many thoughts swept thro' his mind; and linking them all together now was the fresh-forged chain of revolt. . . .

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He slid deftly thro' the lush grasses, murmuring over and over:

"Geem. Menarp sef fel ts. . . . Geem ba! . . . Grapbel! . . ." And the thin rattling of that new-forged chain sounded with delectable clangour in his mind from then on.

He swung up into a tree with a sigh of release, and passed on, leisuredly, from tree to tree, till he was come to one that bore fruit, when he paused, and squatting with his back to the trunk, his legs clinging to a bough, he ate some mechanically, then considered his daring thoughts. They excited him. His eyes blinked rapidly; his hands wandered about, and he was unconscious that they were employed with nothing. . . .

The night began to fill with small sounds. The jungle quivered with the stealthy rousing life in it. The utter blackness under that unbroken roof of interwoven thick foliage was another firmament, starred with sudden, prowling eyes. A rustle, as undergrowth parted, brushing a passing, sinuous body . . . a little, started, rapidly-lost clatter of a pebble spurned by a trailing paw . . . a rending cry of prey swiftly pounced upon . . . all the terror and anguish

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of the jungle smothered to half-sounds that scarcely rose above the multitudinous-leaved roof to trouble the vast outside air, and its remote sky pricked with remoter stars. . . ."

Teena remained in his tree till the first weak dawn, when, leisuredly still, he passed from tree to tree, and so to the jungle's edge: to the niggardly clearing that was Tobbe. . . .

Three days later, the last strands of patience holding him to Mr. Chelson, snapped. Fear and anger stirring in him, he danced from foot to foot, his arms waving, his mouth bared: shewing his clenched teeth. He could only mumble and snarl. Presently, he became more coherent, but still in his own language. Finally, wrenching open the door, he shouted:

"I've stood you—long enough!" His arms rose and fell spasmodically with his emotion; his eyes glared, his mouth remaining savagely open,—then he darted out: his ungainly form sinking onto all fours.

Mr. Chelson, taking rapid aim, threw a chair in the hope of effective results. It struck a neighbouring hut, bursting spectacularly in a shower of fragments, some fifty yards from the scrambling Teena. With a curse, Mr. Chelson

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abandoned the chimpanzee to unnameable retributions; and sought his whisky. . . .

Teena's return to the jungle, and to his old life, was easily accomplished. But his acceptance by his fellows was not so simple a matter. During the first couple of days, they held grimly aloof: pretending not to see him. Then, gradually, they took to watching him: noting his every movement: his goings and comings. Before the first week was over: several of the most curious, and several of the kindest-natured, accosted him: the former with questions; the latter with information of recent events, and of discovered food in the neighbourhood. To all, he was courteous and friendly; and eventually he found himself unconditionally accepted, and allowed a place in their councils. . . .

With what relief did he relinquish the hundred tiring, uncomfortable contortions and contrivings, that humans use: the details and finicky, useless complications! and re-assume the old simplicities! Day was become a vivid time of calm enjoyments; and slowly, more and more distant the hideous ritual thro' which he had been forced by the urgent Mr. Chelson. The night was ever a delight: a coolness and a wideness, a constant

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feeling of the friendly touches of leaves and twigs, and the security of good, seizable boughs.

But, despite his appearance of having forgotten entirely his long period of alienation in Mr. Chelson's company,—thought of that period was constantly with him. He gave himself much to escaping from others' company, and, squatting alone high in some dense-leaved tree, or under the drooping boughs of a bush, going over the many mental scars of Mr. Chelson's infliction.

This brooding continued for a month: Teena's dominant, and never-lessening, desire for revenge instructing it: analyzing it, and seeking to draw some plan of accomplishment out of its maze. . . .

When, eventually, he did alight upon a plan: he was amazed at its utter simplicity; its obvious inevitability.—To reverse the old positions: what more patent? He, Teena, the master, and Mr. Chelson the servant; the introduction to a new life: to new customs, a new language;—Mr. Chelson should, with the aid of all possible endeavours, be turned into a near-as-maybe chimpanzee! What a sweet, what a just, revenge! . . .

Teena, reaching this wonderful conclusion, could not contain himself. He danced with wild

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abandon; swang ecstatically along a lithe hanging bough, and swarmed fifty feet up a smooth trunk, chuckling with delight. . . .

But it was one thing to evolve a fine plan; and quite another to enlist his fellows' sympathies, and help in carrying it out.

At first, the proposition was accorded unqualified disapproval. This was tempered, shortly afterward, by acknowledgment that, the whole matter properly considered, it was the only just revenge. Then, various objections were offered, and brilliantly disposed of by the eager Teena, who, finally, by a passionate recital of Mr. Chelson's violent assorted activities when inspired either by temper or whisky, or by both,—carried the excited and emotional company over to his side *en masse*; then departed, hand over hand, thro' the trees, with their enthusiastic pledge of unlimited help, and loud approving shouts of "Lat~~f~~—Le~~g~~! at~~f~~—en~~g~~!" echoing in his ears. . . .

The descent upon Mr. Chelson was made late in the night. He was discovered, as Teena from old experience had expected, asprawl and unconscious in his cane-chair. Whisky had afforded him its unfailing oblivion; and lapped in its all-

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enfolding softnesses he was a noisily-breathing body without a soul.

It was an awkward business for the six chimpanzees: the dragging of Mr. Chelson clear of his hut, thro' and beyond the unconscious Tobbe, into the jungle: strenuous as well as awkward.

Teena directed the proceedings, and led the way. The many times that Mr. Chelson fouled of a root, or a bush, or the wide-spread, long-trailing net of a ground-creeper, were tedious and exasperating. But, lapped deep in, and overheaped with, those all-enfolding softnesses: Mr. Chelson was brought, still unconscious,—but curiously patterned, as to his body, with abrasions, tears and cuts,—to that part of the inner jungle where the rest of the company of chimpanzees awaited. . . .

For some time Teena brooded: regarding his late master. Then, on a sudden thought: began to undress him: tearing away the stained and spotted cotton jacket, the buttonless shirt and wrinkled, shapeless trousers. Lastly, the once-white, but now yellow-brown, shoes.

Still unaware of his position, his meted treatment and his naïve state: Mr. Chelson continued his dalliance in depths of stupor. . . .

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Slowly emerging at length: the darkness of the jungle long since broken to a green-and-mauve half-light: it was to discover himself the centre and cynosure of a close-gathered circle of motionless chimpanzees.

He stared at them a space: comprehension tardily stirring in his mind. He jerked with his limbs; his fingers plucked aimlessly at a long-fronded fern. . . . Then he discovered his nudity. His mind now in full possession of his plight: he struggled into a half-sitting posture; and his eyes darted beyond the rows of bodies, the blinking stares: estimating chances of escape, seeking means. . . . Suddenly his eyes abandoned their quick search: he had recognized Teena.

He breathed: "Teena!"

And all at once, he knew he could not escape: he was held.

"Teena!" he breathed again, swallowing noisily.

He was as good as dead, his brain insisted, as good as dead. He reconstructed events with intuitive leaps of thought; a swift rushing of dizziness rippled and rippled over him, and he closed his eyes. He began stammering. His

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hands trembled, and dropped the torn frondage. Then he fell silent.

And in the silence, still no animal stirred, or averted the fixed stare of his eyes.

Mr. Chelson could bear it no longer. He sprang up and confronted Teena:

“Well, what do you want with me?” he shouted hoarsely. “What do you want?”

* * * * *

The education of Mr. Chelson, from then on, was an arduous and protracted affair. If, at first, he clung tenaciously and desperately to the alluring hope of escape and freedom: he gradually came to acknowledge that its allurements were empty and vain, and to dispense with its glittering sham.—Day and night he was surrounded by a body-guard which never for a moment relaxed its vigilance. . . .

It seemed, in those initial weeks, that Teena had dreamed an impossible dream: despite all efforts,—meticulous instruction and guidance, careful precept and patient admonishment,—Mr. Chelson shaped but poorly, and was worthless human material in the important aspect of innate chimpanzee-stuff content. Many of the

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animals completely despaired of transforming him into anything approaching a chimpanzee; and sought Teena often, begging him to forego his plan; but Teena was immovable in his determination, and refused. Much he drew apart, and brooded; and watched Mr. Chelson ineptly struggle thro' the lengthy curriculum provided for him. . . .

But a wind may not blow from one direction forever; and Mr. Chelson, obeying that law in the scope of which winds and men are equal, began to change, slowly and painfully, but to change, and acquire, at first, small proficiency, which, eventually, shewed in his grasp a consummate mastery.

It no longer became necessary to keep him, a whole morning, practising progression from tree to tree, till he cried, worn and aching, for an interval of respite on the ground, which would be refused; and then, when, in one of the swings, he missed his clutch and fell headlong,—to punish him by making him hang by his calves from a bough for the duration of Teena's pleasure, after which throbbing position, forcing him up the smooth trunk of a tree to its summit.

Mr. Chelson now did all of these things with comfort and without anxiety; and his brain had at

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length accepted the fact that the ground was no longer a necessity for him, but an occasional luxury.

His first great day of triumph was when he raced a score of chimpanzees thro' the trees to a distant glade of succulent roots; and, the glade being therefore his, by right of prior claim: he generously allowed the outpaced and disappointed ones share in the food. . . .

But the gushing rains on his naked body; the fierce sun; the piercing of thorns, and malicious prickings and rippings of boughs and bushes; had taken him some time to endure with equanimity. But his hair grew long, and matted over his neck; his beard, rejoicing in its license, spread thick and prolific,—and before long, only his eyes were visible: wide-opened and sharp-stared. Because of these eyes, and their unique quality of unblinkingness: he was called “Strong Eye”: no chimpanzee could out-stare him; each that attempted the feat was forced to void his glance, and to retire. . . .

Naturally hairy over the chest and belly, the legs, and arms: he was glad of this characteristic: it served him with appreciable protection,—both as to covering, and as to colouring. His progress

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in chimpanzee-language was slow but steady; and he took pride in enlarging his vocabulary as the months passed. So far as the other inhabitants of the jungle were concerned: to most of them he constituted both a puzzle and a problem. His first weeks had provided him with feasts of terror and helplessness; but his bodyguard had invariably explained him, or protected him, satisfactorily. His hardily-acquired animal-craft soon became recognized, and thereafter, in moments of crisis, stood him in excellent stead. . . .

And so: "Strong Eye," one with a company of chimpanzees, ranging the jungle, was become an altogether different creature from Mr. Stanley Chelson, once of Tobbe. The most that could have been said of Mr. Chelson was that he had once been a man. The least that could be said of "Strong Eye," was that he was a chimpanzee. We have done with that shadow that once shewed in Tobbe: it is dead. But "Strong Eye's" array of excellences may well detain us, and call forth our envious admiration. Chief of these excellences was his zest for life: with what energy and enthusiasm he spent his days and nights! His affection for Teena, half-submerged, in the old Tobbe days, by a running tide of whisky and

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disappointment, became uppermost and splendidly apparent. Rancour subsided: Teena put out of his mind the old quarrels, the plans of revenge: he was content in his master-work: the transformation of Mr. Chelson into "Strong Eye." And "Strong Eye" was happy: truly free of care and happy for the first time in his life, in the wild free days, the calm, scented, pleasurable nights that succeeded each other in the dim green, or the cool dusk, or the black mystery, of the wonderful jungle his house and his home. . . . Peace welled sweetly in his heart: the sacred drops ran in his veins. He knew Beauty: her cool calmness breathed constantly about him; she stood before him, haunting and sanctifying all spaces and places wherein he moved. . . .

Tho' now quite accepted by the company of chimpanzees, some few individuals still retained prejudices against him; and it seemed unlikely that anything could occur to cause them to remove these, and accept him completely. Several years passed in this fashion, when a catastrophe wrought a sudden decision, and banished the last remaining prejudices for ever.

Teena, one night, straying alone, was trampled by an elephant, and died.

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The great grief of "Strong Eye" ensuing, compelled towards him a strong rush of sympathy, that turned with slow subtlety and gathering strength into love. . . .

For some time, "Strong Eye" moved about alone, and had nothing to do with councils or conversation; mourning apart. Returning, at length, he found himself elected leader. The honour overwhelmed him, and touched him. And from then on, he worked, and thought, long in the interests of his company. By virtue of his humanity, added to his acquired chimpanzeeship, he became supreme, and one of the lords of the jungle. . . .

And, in the rich soil of his mind, there began splendidly to shew the blossom of a great idea. He thought often upon Tobbe: that untidy cluster of huts grouped in the clearing grudgingly yielded by the proud jungle. And he thought of the sixty or seventy Europeans: English, Germans, Portuguese and Dutch: that composed Tobbe. And the splendour of his idea glowed in his desire to bring them to a like felicity such as he enjoyed. He saw them prevailed upon to relinquish civilization, which he viewed as but a mountain of complications raised upon the plain of existence, and

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to enter the wide jungle and take up once more their relinquished ancient birthright of freedom and wildhood and happiness. And he saw the chafing majestic jungle, released, spread jubilantly over that clearing, and cover for ever the village that once was Tobbe.

That idea was powerful, and not to be withstood; that splendour not to be ignored.—“Strong Eye,” on hands and feet, entered the clearing in the late afternoon. As he approached Tobbe, he walked erect, and a fine, astonishing figure he appeared. He went straight to the central space fronting the store, and, as he went, ridding his mind of the jagged, sharp and low-guttural speech which now seemed natural to him, and patiently searching his memory for the old speech of the round smooth words running in delicate procession.

He clapped his hands, and called loudly; and the huts exuded curious and perplexed men, who lounged lazily near, and grouped about him. All Tobbe eventually stood there, and heard his amazing plea. Scarcely an interjection came at first; but on “Strong Eye’s” revealing his old identity:

“Don’t you remember Stanley Chelson? Stan.

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Chelson? That's me, then. O, I'm different now. . . ."

They shouted at him, refusing belief. But he took no notice, and went on: telling them of life in the jungle, urging them to accompany him back—

There was loud jeering laughter. Then, as he persisted and insisted, and none could refuse note of his sincerity: they cried that he was mad, and gestured at him to return to his jungle, and quickly, and leave them in peace. . . .

But nothing that they said roused his anger, nor dissipated his patience. In his mind, glowed the splendour. He waited for silence; then said finally:

"It's no good. You've got to come. I've arranged it. You'll have to give in. . . ."

They stared at each other.

"He's mad! He's mad!"

They stared, and began moving. Slowly their interest in the incident was evaporating. . . . Then suddenly they paused. "Strong Eye" had put his hands to his lips and shouted to the distance: "Hmeen! it! Hmeen! it!"

Instinctively, almost with one accord, the men glanced apprehensively behind.

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Then a startled tremor took them.—Emerging all round from the jungle, scores deep, appeared a ring of deliberately-advancing chimpanzees. Even while they stared, taken completely by surprise, it began with ominous sureness and swiftness to gather unbrokenly, and draw in. . . .

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BEFORE the young king Merea had reigned a month, it was clear to his Councillors that the brawl and babble of government afforded him no delight at all. The fact was commented on among them; but they reminded each other that Merea was but a young man; and that the weight of a crown presses heavily upon unaccustomed brows. . . .

The passage of four years, however, shewing Merea's attitude unchanged, found them, accordingly, reconciled to their destiny: the wand of supreme office was indeed in the hand of Merea, but it waved,—or this way, or that—in obedience to their will. . . .

It was bandied about his land that Merea was a dreamer. Such was, in fact, the truth. His waking hours were divided among three activities: reading, dreaming and government.

He read,—violently, anxiously, hurriedly; as a starving man eats. The urgency to read would

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fall on him suddenly, like a fever-fit; and like a fever-fit would rack him with torment, and allow him no peace, for days at a time. Invariably, a long period of languid inaction would ensue: his mind would be engaged with the enchanting nebula of dreams. . . .

At such times as affairs of State demanded his presence in the Council Chamber: he had long ago found it exceedingly difficult to follow, link by link, the slow, deliberate unwinding of the chains of diplomatic talk; and the process void of all interest to him when he did so. Accordingly, he had gradually given over any pretence to meticulous attention; and would sit, at the head of the long, document-scattered table, as impervious to the rise and fall of disputation about him, as a cliff of granite to the dash of blown spray. His curious grey eyes would be of a sudden veiled over with thin, but impenetrable, grey veils; and behind these his spirit would have escaped and joined in a faring of dreams. . . .

On one subject he was wont to talk wistfully and at length. It was the dreamer's inevitable subject: Perfection.

"I have seen," he would say: "Poverty, suffering and sorrow. I have seen ugliness. Let us,

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my lords, at once make laws: so to eradicate these evils! Our country is a fair country. In the midst of fairness, how can we allow other than fairness? My lords, I pray you! . . . As for me: I am filled with disgust for myself! I read many books, and use long hours extravagantly spending my thoughts on impossible imaginings;—and thus I go treading ever, selfishly, the treadmill of myself. I would abandon my ways forthwith! Are not my hands as other men's? And my mind? I would have my hands and mind yoked to the service of Perfection! I would engage against all these cruel evils that beset our land. . . . O my dear lords, it is my heart's desire that our land be made perfect. . . ."

And the old men who were the Councillors would answer gravely: nodding, and fingering their beards; making involved reference to the inscrutability of the ways of the gods with men; drawing attention to the illustrative phenomenon of the fly in amber; and assuring their Master of their implicit devotion to his commands, their profound admiration for his disinterested and lofty concern.

They would leave him: their gait slow and shuffling; their white heads sunken on their

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breasts; murmuring, each to each. And Merea, shortly, would open a book; or else be drawn away by a gentle dream to spaces beyond the world. . . .

The day was bound to come when he would look about him for a new book to read,—and would look in vain. That unwelcome day eventually arriving, he sent for his Lord Librarian, and said to him:

“Can it be that I have read all the books in your care?”

The Librarian waved a hand explanatorily:

“Your majesty has read with such diligence—” Then he bethought himself. “There is the Blue Room. . . .”

Merea sighed.

“And, of course, the Green Room. . . .”

“Many of the books in the Green Room I have re-read five times, or, it may be, six.”

“It is true,” declared the Librarian. “And how useless that I mention the Long Gallery—”

“How useless,” echoed Merea, toying with a tuft of ermine on his sleeve.

“Or the Domed Room”. . . .

“Alas,” exclaimed Merea. “So, there is no book left in the Palace that would be new to me.” His eyes glanced thro’ the window: seeking the

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near-by three tinkling jets thrown high by the little jade fountain half-hidden in its quiet grove of persimmons. . . .

"And I doubt," murmured the Librarian: "whether there exists a book in the Kingdom that your majesty has not already read."

This, of course, was flattery; or, if you will, such meaningless politeness as was merely fitting to the occasion. But, being a King, the music of flattery had long since become but a dull noise in the ear of Merea; and, as for politeness: it was wont to pass him unnoticed as if unuttered.

The Librarian was dismissed: and Merea opened the gate of his mind: that a dream might perchance drift in. But it seemed there were no dreams abroad that hour; and, restless, Merea fell to considering what he should do. In his extremity of dissatisfaction, he was even considering the novel idea of calling a Council, when he was saved from taking such an unprecedented step, by the return of the Librarian, who had bethought himself again.

"May I suggest to your majesty," said he: "a careful searching of the Treasury? It is conceivable that, among the gifts made, from time to time, by the princes of other lands,—rare

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books, unique manuscripts, may have been included; indeed, it has occurred to me even—”

“An excellent suggestion!” cried Merea; and sent messengers to command the immediate presence of the Lord of the Treasury, the Warden of the State Treasures, and the Warden of the Private Treasures.

When these dignitaries presented themselves, Merea decided to accompany them.

It was his first visit to the thirty great vaults of his Treasury, and he walked slowly, pausing often to examine an object, and to question his Wardens concerning it.

The first vault was filled with the pelts of animals and the plumage of birds. The second with precious ointments, unguents, spices and perfumes. Despite the vessels being either of alabaster or of gold: the sweetness of the air was such that one passed thro’ it indescribably exhilarated and enraptured, and near to swooning. The third vault contained precious metals and gems. A long chest was opened here, and the light directed on its contents. Such a swift flash and glitter leapt out, that Merea raised his hands to shield his eyes involuntarily.

“What is it?” he cried. “Cut diamonds and

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rubies? No; rather the west sky at sunset held prisoner," he declared, and passed on.

The next vault held carpets and tapestries, and woven stuffs of all kinds. Then came a collection of statuary; and after that, on shelves that reached to the high ceiling, a multitude of small objects of divers kinds and uses.

"It is likely that in the Fourteenth Vault we shall end our quest," said the Warden of the State Treasures, looking up from the papers of his Records. "For I see that against that vault is written the names of Yoba, Dia and Matchea."

"But," said Merea: "I have read the works of Yoba, Dia and Matchea already."

"Of course," the Warden of the State Treasures bowed. "Yet, my liege, it has often been said that Yoba, Dia and Matchea each wrote much, but gave little to the world. It may be that works of theirs, of which the world knows nothing, repose yonder in the Fourteenth Vault."

"Quite," nodded the Warden of the Private Treasures.

"True," agreed the Lord of the Treasury.

"Ah," said Merea, pondering; then reached out a hand. "Tell me, of what peculiar value is this gong, that it is here among my treasures?"

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And he held up a small bronze gong.

The Warden of the State Treasures fluttered the leaves of his Records for some moments abortively, then remarked:

“It is a Private Treasure.”

Whereupon the Warden of the Private Treasures busied himself with the matter, and presently announced:

“It is called the Gong of Transportation; and was a tribute of loyalty from the magician Ababa, on the occasion of your accession to the throne. It is endued with the property of transporting objects at will. On the instruction being uttered aloud, and a single note struck from the gong: instant transportation of the object named is effected.”

“As a piece of workmanship,” reflected Merea, turning the gong all ways: “it gives a minimum of pleasure to the eye. . . . And, by the way: when one comes to consider the great Art of Magic, one at once notices it seems to be a convention among magicians that, the more strange, the more wonderful, the result they procure, always the more insignificant, the more commonplace is the vehicle they employ.”

He continued to turn the gong this way and

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that in his hands, and to gaze at it closely,—tho' quickly the keen light of criticism faded in his eyes; and, had the Lord of the Treasury, and the Wardens of the State, and of the Private Treasures, been watching his eyes: they would have observed a sudden veiling of them with what appeared to be thin, but impenetrable, grey veils,—and perhaps have conjectured,—aright,—that the delicate spirit of Merea was adventuring away caught in a press of dreams. . . .

The Lord of the Treasury proceeded a tentative step or two onward; then paused: Merea had not moved.

The Warden of the Private Treasures looked at his Master enquiringly, and drew his rustling robe closer about him, for he was an old man, and the sharp air of the stone-paved vaults pierced with ease the velvet and silk he wore.

Then the Warden of the State Treasures, scanning closely his Records,—eyes following his seeking finger,—murmured: "Of a truth, in the Fourteenth Vault . . ." whereat Merea roused, and exclaimed: "Ah! I have been thinking. . . ." The Warden of the Private Treasures made to relieve him of the burden of the gong.—"No," said Merea; declining: "I require it, and shall

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bear it hence. . . . A most wonderful thought has come to me. . . .” He seemed to have forgotten the reason of his presence in the Treasury; and, on being reminded of it, permitted the Fourteenth Vault to be reached, and a search for manuscripts and books to be instituted,—tho’ it was quite plain to his lords that his interest in the matter had entirely disappeared, and was, instead, directed intensely toward the Gong of Transportation. . . .

The following day, the result of this pre-occupation became known to the whole of the kingdom. Merea had addressed his Council.—

“My lords: you have heard me, often enough, in years gone by, inveigh against Imperfection. I have been, by turns, grieved, angry and despairing. Finally, as a measure of self-protection, I have adopted an attitude of philosophic acceptance. Yet my heart has been exceedingly sorrowful the while; and I have always longed for some place wherein I might live, aware that that place was perfect. A vain desire, you think! and so thought I, until, yesterday,—I came upon this magic Gong. Now, it seems, at last I am able to set about preparing that Perfect Land: a small corner of this our kingdom altered and made wonderful:

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therein to sojourn; and rule as heretofore,—excluding the rest of the world so involved with poverty, suffering, sorrow and ugliness. . . . There, in the midst of perfection: what happiness shall I not know! What content!” . . .

He broke off, musing. Presently he said:

“I shall begin immediately. And I have thought: I shall journey about the world, and whatsoever I see that is perfect, and that I love, that shall I transport to the chosen small corner of my kingdom. And it may be that I shall be journeying long years,—for who can believe that the search for perfection is brief?” A wistful look suddenly shewed in his eyes.—“And the years go by on fierce feet when one is no longer in youth.” . . .

That same month, with a small retinue, he set out. . . .

Now, in the province of Bata-ba-rena there had been built, in the glorious days of the great prophet Krel, a mighty wall: one hundred feet in height, circular in shape, and enclosing a space,—so it was computed,—of some eighty square miles. It had been the will of Krel that the wall be broken by only a single gate. The key to this gate was so massive that it required two men to lift it:

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yet, once placed in the lock, a boy could operate it with a single hand,—so cunningly was the mechanism contrived.

Of this wonderful wall, Merea had often heard ; and he determined that it should be his first acquisition;—the boundary of his Perfect Territory.

After three months of travelling, he approached it, and at once commanded that it remove to the ordained small corner of his kingdom. Raising the Gong aloft, he struck from it a single note;—whereupon it was instantly as tho' there had never been a mighty wall in the province of Bata-ba-rena.

With considerable satisfaction at the successful beginning of the consummation of his heart's desire, Merea journeyed on: traversing the weary plains of Bro, and entering at length the mountainous region of Gra-Cell. In that region was the famous Lake of Tedènera: so deeply sunk between its four guardian peaks that no wind ever disturbed its fair surface: not like to smooth silver; nor pale platinum; nor to a silent gathering of moonlight; but like the æther itself: clear and unmoving: holding ever, inverted, its four guardian peaks ermined with snow and rock. And Merea

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ascended, and gazed on it a long space. Then he retired a distance, and commanded, and wakened the small note of the Gong,—and the lovely Lake of Tedènera vanished. . . .

For seven years Merea wandered, this way and that, about the world; and he saw much beauty; and the thin voice of the Gong spoke often. At the end of seven years, he returned home; that he might arrange his acquisitions as he would have them.

His people welcomed him with great joy; and, because of their welcome, for some days he was so glad that he forgot the reason of his return; then, recalling it, busied himself straightway with the disposal of the imported features of his Perfect Territory. . . .

In the midst of this most exacting work, the Councillors approached him, and, on the plea of pressing business, arranged for his presence at an immediate Council.

With reluctance, and ill-disguised impatience, Merea suspended his delectable activities within the Wall of Krel for a day, and, duly attending at the Council Chamber, was surprised to learn that his subjects petitioned his marriage.

He exclaimed at the idea; but was really

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indifferent. His only desire was to continue with his travels, for the creation of the Perfect Territory.

With this desire, his Councillors stated that they were well-enough acquainted; they begged him, however, before he set forth again, to marry one of the eligible five princesses, with whom it was politic he should: for reasons of state.

"Well, if the matter can be disposed of at once—" conceded Merea, at length.

And, accordingly, he married, and delayed further construction of the Perfect Territory for a year.

At the end of that time, his wife bore him a son.

"It is fitting," he reflected: "fitting that I married, and have now an heir. For him, too, am I preparing this Perfect Territory. And, truly, I must set about it at once, for I am young no longer, alas!" Before he departed, he saw to it that the single gate in the Wall of Krel was locked, and the great Key put in safe keeping; and he issued a command that no person enter the Territory henceforth. . . .

For twelve years Merea wandered, this way and that, about the world: viewing valleys and gorges; streams and cataracts; forests, rivers and rich

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plains. This way and that; considering palaces and gardens, parks, and woods where dwelt strange, or familiar, animals, and birds. And whatsoever he thought most beautiful and most perfect: that he transported to the ordained small corner of his kingdom, by virtue of his command, and the small note of the Gong. . . .

Then it was time to return home, and engage in the long labour of disposition. . . .

For five years Merea laboured thus; yet it was clear to him that much else remained to be sought, and added to the Territory, before it attained perfection.

And presently, he was abroad once more: ranging the wide countries of the world.

It chanced that, when he was come into the remote land of the Bereldeans, and was appraising the wonderful flowered Hill of Caves which is the chief ornament of that land: the King of the Bereldeans approached, and was witness of the sudden disappearance of the Hill. With a cry of rage he accosted Merea: thinking him a magician: demanding the instant return of the Hill.

"I shall not return it," declared Merea calmly.

The King trembled with rage.

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"Because," continued Merea: "I have taken it to adorn a Territory I am making: a Territory of Perfection;—and surely Perfection is its own justification?"

But the King would not have it so, and drew his sword, and advanced on Merea.

Now the King was young and lusty, and Merea was grown old, and he was weary with much travelling. And he commanded suddenly, and struck a thin note from the Gong: transporting the King to the far mountains of the Moon;—whereafter he continued on his way without further concern. . . .*

Shortly after this, Merea returned to his own land, and was busy for the space of three years in his Territory; and often in those three years did his son, the young Alèa, beg to be allowed to pass with him thro' the gate, and walk in the Territory. But—"No," refused Merea. "Not yet" . . . and each time he entered alone.

* Some years later, Merea, recalling the incident of the King of the Bereldeans, felt a sudden welling of compassion, and commanded, and struck the Gong, and brought him back to the world; and he had many strange tales to tell of the far mountains of the Moon, and of the wraith-like Moon-people;—but they must be recounted elsewhere.



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It seemed to him now,—incredible fact! how his heart leapt!—that the addition of but a single copse would complete the Territory,—ending his life's work. . . . Ah; he paused. His life's work. His years were many. Truly his search for Perfection had been a long search; and it was not yet over. If, quite soon, he did not discover that single copse,—of just such a size, and of certain precise qualities,—his work, so far as he was concerned, would have gone for nothing: he would have lived in vain: never enjoyed residence in the midst of his making. . . .

The thought urged him anew to effort, and he took boat for 'distant Ild; and in Ild, tho' his desire was indeed sharp and swift, his progress was slow; for he was become enfeebled and weak; and he cried out bitterly against the limitations of his body. . . .

Yet within the year, he came upon a copse: and it was just the size, and possessed the precise requisite qualities;—and he laughed, then sighed, and commanded in a voice fallen to a curious whisper; and struck a thin note from the Gong. . . .

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SILVER NUTMEGS

The two men lifted the great key and placed it in the lock and turned it, and threw wide the single gate of the mighty Wall of Krel. And Merea, with faltering steps, his hands agitatedly clasping the wide fall of his beard, entered his Perfect Territory. After a few paces, he stopped; and his Councillors, clustered at the Gate, observed him swaying gently. . . .

They were just in time to catch him in their arms, as he fell: murmuring softly to himself, his eyes fixed on the fair four peaks that rose holding high the Lake of Tedènera. . . . Presently, he ceased to murmur, then his eyes closed; and he left life in the very moment of his triumph. . . .

It was later that his son, the young Alèa, passed thro' the gate for the first time, and gazed on all the array of splendour and beauty. And as he went here, and there, a faint flashing, first of bewilderment, then of enquiry, gathered in his eyes, and he asked suddenly: "Is it true that my father considered his task finished: this Territory perfect?"

And they answered that his father had indeed considered his task finished, and the Territory perfect. . . .



THE GONG OF TRANSPORTATION

Then, as Alèa frowned and pursed his lips, the expression of enquiry fled from his eyes, and was succeeded by a gleam of determination.

“ But I,” he said. “ I—”

Then he waved a hand.

“ Bring me the Gong,” he commanded.

THE GREAT ONION

THE GREAT ONION

PROFESSOR ERNEST HERREY read again the sentences that induced in him such a sudden peculiar interest: "The largest onion known to Horticulture was exhibited at the Royal Horticultural Show, London, in 1903. It weighed 41 lbs. 5½ ozs.; and, when dissected, was found to consist in seventy-three layers, or "globes" as they are sometimes called. The onion attracted wide attention at the time, and was known as "The Stampian Onion," after its grower, a Mr. Joseph Stamp, of Surrey."

The Professor put down the book, and frowned.

"'Seventy-three layers, or 'globes' as they are sometimes called,'" he repeated, severely. "In 1903, and nothing's been done about it since." He clicked his tongue impatiently a moment; then leaned back in his chair and regarded the glossy, black-and-grey, gently-heaving ball of his

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cat, Marcus Superbus, asleep on the green cushion of the opposite chair.

"Marcus," he said.

An ear was detached from a detaining paw, and slightly raised at the summons.

"*Marcus.*"

Dreamy amber eyes were revealed a moment, then veiled with suave determination. The Professor was not to be put off so easily. Extending an exploratory finger, and moving it gently to and fro along the cat's throat and chin: slowly the amber eyes were brought to a species of attention.

"You know, my dear Marcus," he began; "this is a direct challenge to Science. Nothing less. What have all the scientists been doing, since 1903, that they have not produced an onion composed of more than seventy-three layers? Bah! a mere seventy-three". . . . But here Marcus Superbus was quietly asleep again. . . .

The Professor allowed his gaze to rest on the open pages of the book. He could not refrain from drawing his brows once more together to express his emotion of mingled impatience and disgust.

Presently he snapped the book shut.

THE GREAT ONION

"I shall at once proceed," he declared, "to raise a Really Great Onion. I pick up the gage in the name of Science."

The Professor's estate was situated almost in the centre of the by-no-means large, but certainly sparsely-populated, Island of Larindia. A few hundred yards distant from his house, stood a group of three cottages; and, a mile and a half farther on, the small village of Binder St. Lawrence. A light railway connected the village with the principal town, Harkerton, which was on the North coast, and with the three other villages which contained the remainder of the Larindians. A very scattered population: the majority cattle-breeders and farmers.

The Professor had come to the Island for seclusion; and seclusion had been his in truly abundant measure ever since his arrival. He was just beginning to tire of it slightly. His profound examination of the alleged indisputable proofs of the existence of the long-extinct *terriorus letinon*, had ended, a month back, in his sensational complete refutation of the proofs, his accusation that they were very plausible, very ingenious, but forgeries; and that he was convinced the *terriorus letinon* was in reality a myth, and had

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only existed in the lively imagination of some joke-loving writer previous to the fourteenth century. . . . Having no longer any work on hand, it was, therefore, a relief to him that he had alighted upon this statement of the large onion,—and found himself interested in it, and confronted with a self-imposed problem. Each of its three branches was interesting in itself: soils, manures and seed. When he had achieved a bed of the best soil, to which he had added the best manure, and then, finally, had arrived at the best seed, and committed it to the embrace of the combination—the result *must* be, scientifically *must* be, the desired one: the production of a Really Great Onion: transcending, with ease, the beggarly 41 lbs. odd, the meagre seventy-three layers, of the champion growth of 1903 !

He was eager to start on the task at once. . . .

* * * * *

Two years passed in experimenting, before the Professor was satisfied that he had done all that it was possible to do. He was now quite ready. A great bed was prepared of the choicest blend of dry soil, most carefully impregnated with the manure-mixture. The seed,—a bare handful,—



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had passed through the pre-sowing stages of germination the Professor had contrived for it. All was indeed ready. . . . Shortly, the seed was planted. . . .

Strangely, only a single one struck. The first hints were not long in shewing; and three months later: a thick tuft of leaves, standing four feet high, was waving over the protruding top of the maturing Onion: a mighty Onion,—apparently some six feet in diameter: judging from the upheaval of the earth immediately surrounding it; and the near-by subsidence.

The Professor, tremendously elated, was not so excited as to abate one jot his scientific, detached attitude. He made daily measurements and observations; and it was apparent, from these, that the Onion had by no means as yet concluded its growth. On the contrary, it was waxing in girth and height daily; its top was slowly rearing itself up, with its waving greenery: for all the world like a small hump-shaped hill surmounted by a wood. . . .

The whole population of the Island had called to see it. Some of the good people were so dumb-founded they refused to believe in what they saw. Others thought it a work of the Devil. The

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Professor, after all, was a stranger: he came from London, didn't he? and they all knew what Londoners were.

They shouted, argued, bickered. Buggies, carts, horses, motors, cycles had made use of every available road, and the Professor's house was hemmed in completely by them and their freight of people. Those who were convinced of the Onion's reality were loud in congratulation and amazement. Many were frankly envious. . . .

It soon became necessary to take measurements and observations each hour: at such a rate was the Onion growing. . . .

Towards the end of the fifth month, Larindia held its annual Agricultural and Horticultural Show. A deputation waited duly on the Professor to beg of him to enter the Onion in the Vegetable Section, that Larindia might put on record the fact, and honour, of having had exhibited in their Show, the world's Champion Onion. But the Professor, convinced by his observations, that the Onion was still growing, and that it gave every promise of continuing to grow for some time, flatly refused to end its life. The result of this was that the Committee, determined on achieving the honour somehow,

THE GREAT ONION

departed from orthodox behaviour, and created a precedent by awarding (unanimously) the blue ribbon to the Onion, *in absentia*. In a solemn body, they presented themselves at the Professor's house with the award, one afternoon, and proceeded to tack it, rakishly, on the vegetable's side. This done, they departed: feeling they had extracted themselves from a difficult situation with much neatness, tact and *aplomb*. . . .

A month later, even the Professor had to abandon his so-far carefully-preserved detached attitude. The Onion had exceeded his very extremest calculations. (One had almost said "imaginings,"—but Science never imagines.) There was now,—he announced publicly,—no limit to which the Onion might not grow. It was, at the moment, threatening his house. . . . Two days later: the outer wall was staved in, and portions of the roof fell in consequence. . . . Removing, with despatch, his papers and some clothing, and the more important of his books,—the Professor shrugged his shoulders over the fate of the rest of his goods, and left them to be swallowed up in the monstrous Onion's triumphal progress. He removed to one of the group of three cottages a few hundred yards distant. . . .

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When it became necessary for the tenants of the three cottages to remove to more remote demesnes: there arose considerable grumbling. . . .

But the Press of the world was thrilled, and filled with a wild ecstasy such as it had only known in the early days of the Great War. The London papers, possibly of all the other countries, ran the sensation the most completely and competently. This, of course, was only as it should be: the Island of Larindia being a British Colony, and so close to Great Britain. Shortly, however, it was observed that the ever-enterprising "*Morning Express*" was determined to constitute itself *the* authority on all matters pertaining to the Great Onion. It began at first a four-page supplement, which it called "*The Herrey Onion Supplement*": in which it dealt fully with all news, discussions, and correspondence on the subject.

A week or two after this was instituted, it was found necessary to enlarge it to eight pages, and instal a stop-press column. The Professor was the world's hero,—Mr. Chaplin and Signor Mussolini being relegated to instant forgetfulness. He was photographed and interviewed continuously. Everywhere that one went: there was only the single topic of conversation; and specu-

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lation was rife as to the extent of the Onion's vitality. . . .

And all the time, steadily, persistently, the Onion was continuing its growth. . . .

When it approached the village of Binder St. Lawrence: there was evidence of very real consternation. The vegetable was now three miles in diameter, and considerably over a mile in height. The villagers protested with one voice. They were being forced to leave their homes, and their livelihood. They could not do it. They would not. The Onion must be destroyed. The Government must step in and help them. . . .

But all the learned Societies of the world gathered together, and as one body, in the august name of Science, petitioned the Government to take no measures against the Great Onion, but, instead, to preserve it. The Government, after long deliberation, consented,—and “*The Herrey Onion Bill*” was rushed through its various stages, and became an Act. It provided ample compensation for such inhabitants of Larindia as suffered from the incursion of the Onion; and also prohibited any damage being done to it in any manner whatsoever. . . .

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On the actual day that this was finalized: the Onion had flattened out and obliterated the entire rambling village: Binder St. Lawrence was no more. . . . It was apparent, now, that the whole Island would, in time, be covered. There existed a mere circular strip of land (the Island being more or less circular) roughly ten miles in width to receive attention,—and the thing would be done. The island would be an entire onion! And what of all the people? Now confined to the circular strip—between onion and ocean—they would have either to take to house-boats, or depart for England. . . . While the whole world was wondering what would be the outcome of it all: the learned Societies of the world, foregathered in London, duly decided that the Herrey Onion was entitled to the tremendous honour of being accounted the Eighth Wonder of the World. When they made this intelligence known,—at once people began flocking from all parts to Larindia. . . . The Larindians now perceived the solution to their problem. Hastily they built house-boats (very hastily, since the remaining strip of land was a bare six miles now) and in these conducted the sight-seers with a new-found pride in their Island,—and also (this

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primarily) with hope (not risen in vain) of remuneration. . . .

Scarcely a month was necessary to despatch the six-mile strip: Larindia was vanquished and vanished: the Great Onion was in sole possession.

A very extraordinary sight it was from the sea: with its russet-coloured outer-skin, here and there frayed or worn, shewing great patches of gleaming silver, veined faintly with green;—a wonderful globular mountain, with a high crown of forest that caught the passing clouds, and tangled them in its branches.

A famous airman had sought to land on the Onion's top,—a daring feat,—but had found it quite impossible owing to the acute slope, and to what he afterwards termed “the veritable jungle” it possessed.

Closely following on this gallant attempt, a celebrated Alpinist made application to Parliament for permission to contravene the “No Damage” Act, to the extent of cutting steps up the Onion,—with the one purpose (as he maintained) of affixing the Union Jack to its apex.

This permission graciously accorded: the Alpinist essayed the ascent in the presence of thousands of people who watched him from boats. Innumerable

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cameras clicked, as he courteously waved a hand to the multitude in acknowledgement of their vociferous cheer; and cinematograph-machines were in evidence in the most favoured positions to record as much of the venture as they could.

He was absent eight days. Then, reappearing, completely worn out with the arduousness of the assault,—he could only nod faintly in reply to the pressmen's enquiry as to whether he had succeeded.

He was fêted and honoured in due course. His ascent was likened to the "Epic of Everest." The Royal Alpine Club awarded him its gold medal. The King sent a telegram of admiring congratulation; and was pleased to bestow on him the accolade of Knighthood.

Unfortunately, he did not live long to enjoy these honours. A month later, whilst climbing a ladder to disengage a tendril of ivy from the antennæ of the wireless attached to his country cottage in Dorset: he fell,—a mere distance of fourteen feet, and broke his neck, death being instantaneous. . . .

When the Onion was overhanging the Island by some seven or eight miles,—abruptly the "*Morning Express*" changed its favourable atti-

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tude toward the Eighth Wonder, and appeared one morning with the impressive, and terrifying, headlines: "*The Great Onion Menace. England in Danger of Being Obliterated. Famous Scientist Fixes Date Thirty-Eight Years Hence.*" Followed the Scientist's calculation, based, of course, on the consistent past growth of the vegetable. . . .

The following morning,—still retaining the headline "*The Great Onion Menace,*"—the same paper printed an urgent appeal to its two million readers not to allow England to be made away with.

The whole of the English Press took up the cry; and the Press of the rest of the world, after it. Under the heading of "*The Impending Supremacy of the Vegetable. Will Man Succumb?*"—one influential weekly journal described the Onion as having been regarded hitherto as a comic vegetable,—a distinction which it shared with the Banana. With what irony, then, did we find the Comic impinging upon the Tragic! The Socratic paradoxical dictum that the Comic *is* the Tragic, and vice versa, was never more fully illustrated than by this latter-day *contretemps*.—And so on. . . .

It seemed that the cornucopia of Plenty contained only vituperation directed against poor

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Professor Herrey. He was the man to blame for the whole dangerous, impossible situation. Public opinion reviled him. It became increasingly unsafe for him to walk abroad unattended by a couple of policemen. The one-time favourite of the world was tasting now,—in company with all such favourites that had ever lived,—the bitter flavour of public hatred. He became morose. He ceased to leave his house so often. Then his goings-out became rare. Finally, they ceased altogether.

One morning, his housekeeper found him dead in his library: a bullet in his temple, a revolver clutched in his hand. . . .

That November, all over the country, his effigy was burnt amid the snapping of crackers, the spluttering of catherine-wheels and the flaring of coloured lights, in place of the outmoded Guy Fawkes. . . .

Meanwhile, the Press, led by the indefatigable "*Morning Express*," continued its policy of alarming the people of England to take some action,—with its characteristic, and appropriate, fury. The effect of this insistent propaganda was to summon Parliament abruptly, and rather unkindly, from its recess, to debate the matter.

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It decided, in the course of time, that the Great Onion must, yes,—be destroyed. There remained, truly, no other alternative. . . .

A Committee of Experts,—created to go into the means of effecting the desired end,—agreed on mining the Onion thoroughly with T.N.T.

The work was put in hand immediately. . . .

Several months later, the task completed, it was thought fitting that the King should, by throwing an electric switch, demolish the menace; and restore the world to its pre-Onion peace, and its old Seven-Wonders-ism once more.

The King, before accomplishing the act, read a long speech (prepared for him by that curious branch of the Civil Service whose duty it is to supply the Royal Family with speeches) into a microphone (disguised by the Broadcasting Corporation for the occasion with tastefully-arranged flowers) so that the whole world heard that “By the grace of God, it is our duty to defend the Empire. . . . Therefore, we, in this faith, etc., etc. God does not will it,—our Parliament, and our loyal subjects, do not intend it,—that we allow this threatened encroachment of the Vegetable Kingdom on the Animal. . . . Hitherto, etc., . . . etc. . . . Therefore, we,—sure in the

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knowledge that what we do can only lead to a tightening of the bonds of Empire, to the stronger linking of all peoples in common brotherhood each to each, and to cementing yet closer our cherished regard for our people,—do now depress this switch," etc., etc. . . .

But the Committee of Experts had, in their deliberations, overlooked two important things: resulting from their recommendations.

The use of several hundred thousand tons of such powerful explosive as T.N.T., not only successfully disposed of the Great Onion,—but as successfully disposed of the Island of Larindia, in its entirety.

The other unexpected,—but very obvious,—result was the terrible death-roll that ensued. The odour, consequent upon disintegration, swept in a violet-coloured cloud over the Atlantic: impenetrable and undissolving: greater in its density and intensity of destruction than any of the War gases. All the shipping that came in its way fell its victims; and, reaching America eventually, but now gradually beginning to weaken thro' absorption by the air: it continued its dreadful depredations for three days, before it was ultimately dissipated.

THE CITY
OF ALL CITIES

THE CITY OF ALL CITIES

THE boy lived with his mother in the loneliest part of the country thro' which passed the Great Road. Theirs was the only cottage among those silent hills, where, for many miles: so meagre seemed Nature! allowing only sparse woods here and there, and setting about them either widths of stony barrenness, or sombre-lying bog. Where it was possible for any to grow: the grass grew thinly, and to but finger's length; and the few frail timid-seeming flowers that the love of Spring drew as response from the ground, seemed to weary quickly of their struggle for life, and to die after a brief shewing. There was a lake; but even it!—so small, it seemed grudged.

But, as if a recompense for failure below: arched the generous sky: withholding nothing down the years: triumphant, magnificent! by day: spreading wide the quiet ecstasy of dawn; allowing from East to West, from North to South, the

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clouds to roll in a thousand differing shapes; filling the air with the gentle fall of rain: thin, endless, silver cords; giving the fierce turbulence of sunset. And by night: loosing the moon to drift like a lost bubble, giving the stars: a diamond-scattered plain. . . .

As far back as the boy could remember: first, there had been his mother. Thro' that motionless mist of gold which filled the days of infancy: there had always been her pale, sweet face: stooping down and over him, and meeting his with soft lips or cheeks; and there had always been her guiding and ministering hands. Then, when the mist paled, withdrew slowly into the distance, and ultimately passed,—leaving life and the world very clear, hard and frightening: he had come to know Loneliness: who had no words; but who would listen to all that was told her; at times her eyes brightening with started tears, or her lips opening tremblingly to free little sighs, that sounded more sad than the stirring of last year's dead leaves. She became his constant companion. When, at length,—and, as it seemed to him, how miraculously!—he came to know the Great Road intimately: he weekly, and then daily, saw less of Loneliness.

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He had always delighted in the Road, and thought that he knew it well.—The fierce silver of it in the light of the sun; the calm silver in the night! Often he considered it,—loving it for the sureness with which it conducted travellers thro' difficulties: safely past the secret snares of bogs, the bewilderments of forests and woods and widths of unpopulated country. He had been told that, far away, it came to a Great City built on a wide plain that swept down to the sea. And often he thought on the Great City;—that, stronger with each year he aged, grew the desire to follow the Road to its goal.

He grew suddenly to hate Loneliness; and he hated her the more because she shewed she knew she was no longer a wanted companion,—the tears fell ever thickly from her eyes, and her lips trembled with her sighs continually. . . .

But he had come, at last, really to know the Great Road! And he thought he had known it before! The difference! . . . All else, but this wonder, was forgotten at once. It happened one still summer morning. Over the dewed grass, with the first long yellow beam of the sun, a shining figure approached him, and called his name in a gentle voice. He drew back:

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"You know my name?"

"I have always known it."

"But who are you?"

"The Spirit of this Road."

Thickly now crowded the beams of the sun, and in them the grass shone with its myriad globes of dew.

"I am come with a song," said the Spirit.
"Others have heard it before."

The boy rose trembling. He nodded dumbly.

"Listen," said the Spirit;—then sang: softly, slowly—so sweetly! of the City to which it led. . . . When it had done,—the boy wept, his heart leaping with a new urgent joy. This City,—all that he had heard of it; ah, surely, now he knew!—"It must be the City Beautiful!" he cried.

And from then, the one purpose of his life became eventually to enter it.

He told his mother. He said: "I want to go now."

But his mother sighed: "Not yet, my son. Wait till you are older."

He asked her curiously: "You sigh?"

She turned away; but he confronted her:
"Tell me, why do you sigh?"



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She looked at him with tears: "Because I am old; and have seen many cities." She would say no more. . . .

"My dear, my dear," he whispered: "I shall take you with me. Don't think I shall leave you, and go alone! Together we'll enter the City Beautiful. . . ."

But he set out alone, despite his planning. When he was sixteen, his mother died. . . . "This is not how I thought to go," he sighed, alone in the silent cottage. "I meant only joy to be in my heart, but sorrow is there as well."

Then he thought: Yet I go to the City Beautiful! And he heard again in memory,—how ringingly!—the slow, sweet song of the Spirit. . . .

Presently, as he strode along: his heavy heart lightened. Each evening, in a dream, the gentle Spirit appeared to him, and compassing him with tender arms, sang: so that he murmured over and over in his sleep: "It *must* be the City Beautiful!"

And by day: the thought that each hour he drew nearer to it, filled him with a fierce excitement.

He thought, many times: Can it be, that soon, soon, these eyes will look on it; these feet walk its

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streets,—bearing me up in the midst of all delight ? Can it really be that no dream holds me now with sweet deceit ? . . .

On the sixth day, he paused to speak to a bright-plumaged bird settled on a leafless bough: “Have you come from the City? Tell me, what is it like? More beautiful than I have guessed? I go to it now.”

The bird suddenly let ring a low, passionate song: so sweet and so glad, that the boy cried: “If it is as lovely as you sing,—I shall dwell there always!” and hastened on. . . .

At noon, the following day, from a hill he saw the Great City spread on its wide plain: its marbles and metallèd roofs sparkling gaily under the sun; the vast sea in the distance. He gazed in silence. . . . Presently he began to descend.

It was dusk when he neared the gates. A gentle wind had risen; and suddenly in the wind he heard a familiar voice. He paused.

“I go no further: here we part. I have brought you safely to my beloved city, have I not? Good-bye.”

He answered it softly: “Good-bye, dear Road.” Good-bye to the friend he had always known and loved. . . . He passed on then, and entered the

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Gates; and cried exultantly to himself: "I am here, I am here! In the midst of the City! The City Beautiful! After so long! After all the thoughts and the dreams! . . ."

And he looked about wonderingly at the great painted buildings; the statuary grouped here and there; the long narrow gardens rich with flowers set in the centre of the paved streets; the throng of chattering people.

At first he did not hear the slow bell approaching; but the throng around became silent; and then he heard voices chanting; and the bell's solemn note above the voices; and in a moment a procession appeared: priests with books and tapers going before a black-draped bier. Behind came mourners walking very slowly: their eyes looking steadfastly down.

The boy shrank back as they passed; at first not understanding. Death, here? Sorrow? Death and Sorrow in the City Beautiful: the city of all delight, happiness, peace? . . .

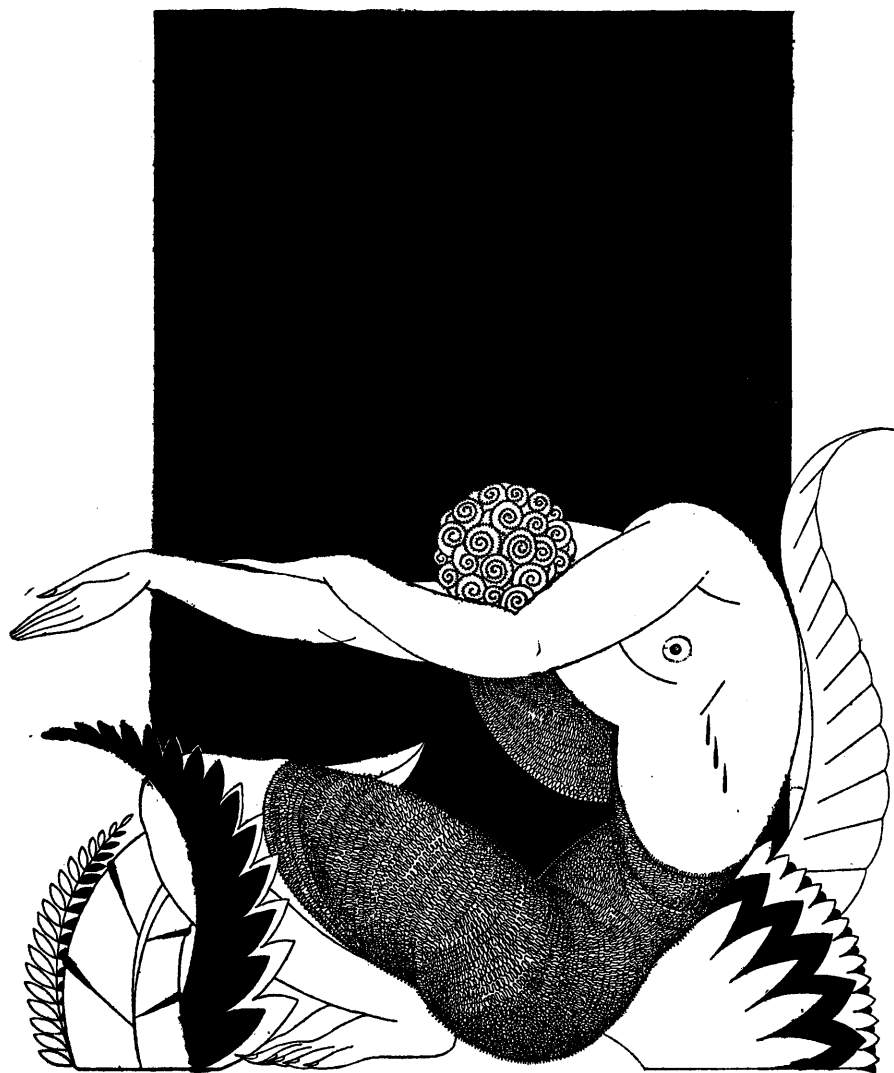
Then the sharp truth struck into his heart. He knew, he knew now, O he knew: he had been wrong, deceived. This city,—it was just—a city, a great city,—nothing more. . . . Overwhelming bitterness seized him, and he wept. . . .

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O young, young heart, wherever you beat: strong, eager and brave: brave with the sweet fierceness of youth: know that the wounds you must receive will be many! The cruelty of life dotes on your inexperience, your glorious rashness. Wound upon wound will be dealt you, till you grow scarred and calloused, and can feel no more: come to the dim insensitiveness of age. But of all wounds destined to be yours and remembered: the first will ever remain chief; when you leapt out, freely exposed, to do fine battle: simple target for the unerring, ruthless marksman! . . .

He could not remain within the walls. He had no wish to see more of the City: disappointment and grief drove him out—away, far away. He walked blindly, until forced by exhaustion to rest, when he made a bed of fallen pine-needles, and slept. The moon, nearly at its full, came out from a pall of cloud, and silvered the two last tears that his long lashes had hardly yielded to his cheeks. . . .

How well that it is so ordained that youth remains only briefly in the dark valleys; and soon seeks out, and wins to, the hill-tops of sun and wind!



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As he slept, there came to him in a dream a Spirit—beautiful as the Spirit of the Great Road he had known since childhood—and called his name in a gentle voice.

And in his dream he answered: “But who are you?”

“The Spirit of the Road whereby you rest.”

“What would you with me?”

“I am come with a song.”

“Ah,” sighed the boy; “I have heard such a song before.”

“Listen,” said the Spirit; then sang: softly, slowly—so sweetly! of the City to which it led. And in his dream, the boy wept with a strange new joy; and felt his heart leap with a great eagerness; and he stirred, and woke, and murmured, staring at the sliding moon: “It must be the City Beautiful. . . .”

Soon he fell asleep again. . . .

At dawn he rose.

“Ah, this time!” he cried. “This time!” and so started out upon the new Road. . . .

But when, at length, he reached the City,—was it not as a Challenger that he entered in, and strode its streets?—And how else should the answer come to him but as a driving thrust

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sinking deep into the heart?—The swarm of beggars sickened him: pressing about him: gibbering, mumbling, whining:—perceiving him at once to be a stranger—beseeching alms in the names of all the gods; describing their foul diseases and manifold miseries. . . .

He had failed then, again. . . . The tears fell hotly down his cheeks, and he turned away slowly.

Ah, somewhere, surely, waited the City Beautiful? Or was he crazed: like a lost desert-traveller seeking the mirage always in the near-by distance? . . .

But how could he fail to believe the single burden of the songs of the two Roads? His mind, his heart,—why, his soul, had instantly responded to it—for nothing, tho', nothing. . . .

Yet,—he felt, somewhere waited the City! If another Road called to him, and sang, and bid him on, he would obey as he had obeyed the first Road.

He was young; how could he expect to find, immediately, and with ease, the City of all Cities? He must be patient; was he not prepared to give all the days of his life, if need be, to the search? Eventually, he knew, eventually he would find



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it! How he longed, above all else, to reach it, become a citizen of it, to share its perfections! . . .

That night, in the quiet of a dream, another Spirit came, and sang to him; and the following day he set out, full of strong hope that this time his desire would be realized. . . .

But it was not to be. The Great City to which he came, after long journeying, was even as the other two Cities he had entered. . . .

But his heart kept its courage serene, and urged him on. . . .

The slow pageant of the months brought in to the earth the four Seasons, and bore them away; and always a Road was leading him to the City of all Cities. Somewhere, somewhere it waited!

Disappointments crowded one on the other thickly: grown now into manhood,—he went on with the years,—still seeking. . . .

From vigorous manhood he passed to faltering age: worn with his long wandering. His was the young heart grown old with high service: the scarred heart gaping among its scars with new wounds: the great heart of the indomitable Challenger!

And he came, one evening, to rich meadow lands that held the bright seam of a slow-running river.

SILVER NUTMEGS

There he sank by the road-side, and dipped his hands in the water, making ripples in the inlet that trembled the delicate lily-buds.

And he sighed: "I can go no further." He fell back, closing his eyes. . . .

A lark, poised and hidden in the sky, like some ærial fountain let down a tireless little cascade of song. Over the river,—a flash of silver and iris, a dragon-fly hunted to and fro, threading the lilies and reeds. . . .

"I am tired," he murmured; "tired."

The lark dropped to earth, and there was stillness: the summer day was ebbing. . . . And in the stillness, he heard the first notes of a song sounding faintly,—and opening his eyes, gradually he was aware of a Spirit standing beside him: a Spirit beautiful as those that had come to him so often in the past. And it sang of a City to which it led—such a song that the wanderer's heart beat quickly with its old hope and desire.

He tried to rise, but fell back again weakly, sighing:

"My body is worn out; it will take me no further. And you sing so that I feel, could I but follow you: at last I would find the City I have always sought."

THE CITY OF ALL CITIES

He began weeping; but the Spirit bent over him, and compassed him with tender arms, and murmured: "I am the Road of Death; and truly my way is smooth and easy for age. I lead to a City, far away, to a Great City. . . ."

It sang again: softly, slowly—so sweetly! . . .

When it had done, the old man roused himself: "This time," he cried; "ah, this time! It must be the City Beautiful!" . . .

He took the first step. Immediately darkness closed round him, but he felt the Road firm under foot, and the darkness rang faintly, sweetly with echoes of the Spirit's song.

THE DOOR WITH
THE THREE PADLOCKS

THE DOOR WITH THE THREE PADLOCKS

AS the Princess Orinda entered the room and approached her father, the King, there ensued among the gathered courtiers that involuntary hush, and pause in the midst of gesture, which was ever the first toll exacted by beauty and youth in triumphant combination. The Court Poet leaned toward the Court Painter and whispered: "Thus have I seen a blossom, blown from the bough, pass on a breeze." And the Court Painter, not to be outdone by his friend, returned: "With something of just that grace and lightness of hers, does a white cloud take the sky." Then the tide of conversation flowed again: as it were ripples at first, that quickly swelled to noisy waves. . . . But the King had drawn the Princess to his side:

"My child: it is true that when one comes from reading the writings of the prophets, one does not come away empty. I have been thinking of that prophet who wrote: 'Fortunate is the woman

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whose husband is brave and strong, for she shall be always protected.' Do you wonder at my thought? Alas, I grow old; and how much longer shall things of this world concern me? The little tree I have planted, and tended with love and care,—when I am called away, whose heart and hand will cherish it? O little tree, my single tree of the world! Soon must I go: these white hairs have warned me; and I would leave you with that man who is brave and strong. I have looked around long upon the countries of the world seeking him,—and the gods guiding, have found him at last in the Prince of Shānāreena. He journeys to meet you now; and the betrothal-feast must be arranged,—for it is my will that you wed him. So, when the gods call me from things of this world: I shall go with a heart at peace."

Now, these words came with a sharp strangeness to the ears of Orinda: for she had expected only talk concerning her studies of old history, or languages, or poetry. She smiled her bewilderment shyly, and took her father's hand and kissed it. But he reached his arms suddenly about her, and kissed her cheeks,—so that she smelt the sweet perfume with which his beard was dressed;

THE DOOR WITH THE THREE PADLOCKS

and when she looked into his eyes, saw they were dim with tears.

He signed for her then to leave him, and she went slowly and full of wonder: out into the Court of Statuary, and on: thro' the Court of the Three Fountains: to the third Court which was called the Court of Flowers,—and thence to her room.

And her thoughts were, over and over, wonder, delight, and fear; like fitful gusts of wind they swayed and bowed, or trembled and tossed, the young rose of her heart. . . .

Beldena, her favorite woman, fanned her with the long fan of jadella-feathers: whose wonderful gold and green may not wave before other than queens and princesses; and presently Orinda murmured:

“Beldena, what do you know of the Prince of Shānāreena? Tell me: is he handsome?”

“He is indeed a great prince. The kingdom, to which he is heir, is wide and wealthy and pleasant all ways. But no one, tho' intent on uttering praise of his person, would properly consider him handsome. Rather would they draw attention to the fact that he is princely.”

“Ah,” mused Orinda, “he is princely. . . . Tell me more.”

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"He is short in stature, but very broad. He moves slowly, as frequently is the way of strong men. His eyes are dark, and look out with quick, penetrating looks from under great hairy brows. His beard is straight and black."

"He is young?" asked Orinda.

"He is beyond his first youth," answered Beldena. "One would say, perhaps, he is in his prime of manhood: lusty in the middle years."

"In the middle years," repeated Orinda, looking out thro' the half-shuttered window. "Then his father, the King, is old?"

"Truly. The crown slips from his brow. They say the Prince waits impatiently. . . . Impatience is frequently the temper of strong men."

Orinda dipped her fingers reflectively in the crystal bowl of perfumed water by her side, and remarked slowly:

"It grows in me, Beldena, hearing your words, that I shall not love this Prince of Shānāreena."

Beldena fanned gently with the long fan of jadella-feathers.

"And," continued Orinda slowly: "he journeys even now to meet me, and it is the will of my father that we wed. . . ."

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She fell silent, and closed her eyes; and presently Beldena, thinking she slept, ceased fanning and withdrew. Then did Orinda weep brokenly: unable longer to check herself: and give way to little stricken moans: crouching down among the piled cushions and gay-woven coverings of the couch. . . .

Two days later the Prince arrived; and that same night, the betrothal-feast was set.

When she entered the hall, and they came face to face: Orinda's first look told her that Beldena's description of him had been wrought of too-kindly words. She shrank back from his fierceness and coarseness, but with a quick eagerness he had caught her hand, and had fallen to his knees, and had kissed her hand, the broad hem of her robe, and the gemmed strap of her shoe. Her heart was calling out with shrill fear, but her mind was bidding it be still. And she smiled upon him, and they sat, and the feast began. . . .

But long before it was over, she knew that the thin voice of her heart was calling out in hatred; and it was become agony to listen to her mind—which pointed that she must obey her father's will: there was no escape. . . .

Ancient custom fixed the wedding-day forty

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days after the betrothal-feast. Ten of these days had already passed. Beldena was fanning gently with the long fan of jadella-feathers, and Orinda was restless, turning this way and that, trying vainly to quiet the two voices crying insistently within her. She sighed deeply:

“In thirty days, alas. In thirty days. . . .”

And Beldena knew well of that she was sighing; and her eyes dimmed again with tears, and her hands, holding the long fan, trembled. . . .

But shortly, Orinda, weary of gazing thro’ the half-shuttered window on the single cluster of motionless palms, closed her eyes. Then the fan in Beldena’s hands gradually grew very heavy; and Beldena’s head gradually grew very heavy, too,—and soon the fan was still, and her head was sunken on her bosom.

The hot afternoon held everything hushed: the exultant tyranny of the sun forbade a wind to blow, or a bird to sing. Within the palace was no sound: no sound save, in the central court, the three fountains’ song of coolness, as they sprayed high, each a rose-pattern, and fell in bright showers of caresses for their smooth-carved basins. . . .

Orinda’s eyes opened again. For a few moments

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she considered the palms framed in the half-shuttered window, then the uneasy-postured, slumbering Beldena,—then she rose, and stepping lightly, passed out into the Court of Flowers. The blending of scents, in the heat, was oppressive. Many of the roses were dying in a fall of petals. The purple wistaria, thickly blossomed, shewed like a riot of rich-bunched wine-grapes. But it was yielding slowly, too: fading, its scattered blossom mixed on the ground with the withered rose-petals. Near-by, stood a magnolia-tree: the ivory-like blooms gleaming sparsely here and there on its dark foliage, like an alighting of great butterflies.

Orinda passed on: perhaps lured to their court by the three fountains. As she approached: to stretch her hands under the shining drops, to win a momentary coolness;—she paused: turning aside with a low exclamation of surprise.—The Door with the Three Padlocks had its broad bars down and its padlocks removed! How many times had she passed by that Door! From her very earliest years! And never had it been other than securely barred and locked. She had always wondered: with the long, vague wondering of childhood; the often-interrupted, vivid wonder-

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ing of youth: trying to guess what lay behind the Door. A long-closed chamber? An unfrequented hall?—For what strange reason, then, long-closed, or unfrequented? A secret pleasure, maybe? But who gave it attention, and why with such secrecy? She had asked many times: her father, his Councillors, her women. They had never told her anything: had merely laughed, drawled impossible tales, or evaded the question. It was curious she had never learned the truth. Now, here was the adventurous opportunity: the bars down, the padlocks removed. Actually! She had but to push, and enter, to see for herself.

As she drew nearer, she was aware of the soft tinkle of music, and of voices singing. Hesitating then no longer, she pushed the Door and entered. . . . So! it was indeed a pleasure: bright flowers everywhere; a shady grove of fruit-trees, and calm statuary. A crowd of young men and maids were dancing: now on the cool-breathed lawn, now among the fruit-trees: laughing, singing; moving to the gentle stringed music that four youths made within a gay pavilion hard by. . . . Orinda drew back: she would be recognized: the music would end, the delightful dance stop: the young men and maids would fall aside, bowing,

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banishing laughter, and saying nothing. It was always so when she appeared anywhere. Never could anyone forget she was the Princess. And she longed desperately for them to forget the cruel fact: for once let her be as other girls, laugh and act and play as she would! . . .

As she crouched back against the Door, half minded to leave, yet wishing passionately to remain an unnoticed spectator, she saw for the first time, a tall, motionless figure swathed in a long, many-folded cloak standing close to the pavilion. He held both hands to his face, covering it; and Orinda, after a brief glance, shuddered, feeling a sudden pricking of fear at her heart. But this was forgotten immediately.—A young man had detached himself from the dancers, and was approaching slowly, yet with a delighted eagerness. With what ecstatic step he came: the close white satin he wore showing the young strong lines of his lithe body; the very self of Happiness! She realized his beauty in a long look: his glowing, ruddy cheeks; bright eyes; the clear-scarlet of his smiling mouth, and living gold of his backward-drawn hair. He reached out and took her hands in his: and she felt them, delicate firm hands; and thus, held in an endless

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magic moment, they stayed: looking suddenly, with laughter gone, questioning hushed, all fear and surprise passed,—looking on each other with deep wonderment and a springing humility. It seemed to Orinda that anything might happen then: she might stir and awaken from the intangibility of a dream, even. But this was no dream. . . . She had no thought soever concerning the fact of the Door's concealing this lovely pleasance; nor of the crowd of young men and maids who danced; nor of the cloaked figure whose face was hidden. Did she wonder who was her lover? She began soon to wonder, but not about this. Her only wonder was of the mystery of love. He had not spoken a word, nor had she: they had but looked and come together. . . .

They passed soon, as of one accord, into the dance. Like leaves, borne on a wind, they were wafted this way and that. And when the music was ended, like leaves wind-deserted, they came to rest. And they were beside a bank of flowers: purple and white; and he wove a chain of the purple and white and crowned her with it. Then he spoke:

“Tell me your name, beloved?”



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“Orinda.”

He murmured:

“Orinda. Orinda. . . . Mine is Alendien.”

Their lips drew close at that. She murmured, “Alendien!” and he, “Orinda!” — and with the dear names half-given, began their first kiss. And when they drew back presently to look yet again upon each other, they could not long remain apart, but were breathing “Orinda. . . .” “Alendien . . .” once more, and had sunk back into each other’s arms, and with eyes throbbingly closed, their thoughts streaming away in a half-swoon, found each other’s lips. . . .

That kiss was their farewell. Some signal, unperceived by her, had been given: the crowd of dancers was going: entering the grove of fruit-trees and passing from view. The four youths, with their instruments, emerged from the pavilion, and followed. And Alendien, with sudden tears starting from his eyes, was calling “Adieu!” and leaving as well. A sigh broke from her. He was gone. She looked around hurriedly. The tall, motionless figure with the hidden face alone remained: in its one position close to the pavilion. She shuddered, feeling again a sudden pricking of fear at her heart.

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Quickly, she moved to the Door, opened it, and passed thro' . . . and was in the Court of the Three Fountains. A moment's pause: to stretch her hands under the shining drops, to win a momentary coolness: while her thoughts grew more ordered: then she hastened on, feeling, of a sudden, very weary. When she entered her room: Beldena was still in the same uneasy posture, slumbering: the fan fallen from her hands. . . . Orinda sank noiselessly onto her couch, and closed her eyes. . . .

It was night when she awoke: the window was become a purple square studded with silver. Her first thought was of Alendien, and she whispered his name several times, then closed her eyes a moment, to give way wholly to the remembrance of his arduous lips pressing hers. . . .

Then Beldena stirred and roused, and took up the fan again. . . .

For a while Orinda talked with her, then rose, anxious to hasten to the Door with the Three Padlocks. When she came to it, it was as she had always known it: the broad bars in place; the three padlocks secure and filmed with their years'-old rust. There was not the least hint that so recently those bars had been taken down, those padlocks

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released from their trust, allowing the Door to swing again on obedient hinges !

But Orinda, curious but smiling, had her knowledge,—not only in her mind, but tempestuous in her heart,—and passed on. . . .

A week later she rose from her couch in the clear, hot afternoon, and avoiding the sleeping Beldena, passed through to the Court of the Three Fountains, and found the Door open again. And it happened as before: she entered to find the cloaked figure beside the gay pavilion; the four musicians making a slow music, and the crowd of singing, laughing dancers. As before, there was the quick passionate meeting with Alendien, and the dance, the kisses. . . . Somewhat longer, however, were they together, and spoke more, ere the unexpected signal sundered them. . . . She returned to her room with the sweet deep sorrow of parting weighing down her heart; and she woke Beldena with her weeping, and Beldena, thinking wisely of the Prince of Shānāreena and of the short twenty-three days before the wedding, joined her tears with those of her mistress. . . .

But Orinda said nothing; presently her weeping subsided, her eyes closed and she slept. . . .

Twice in the next two weeks did Orinda find

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the Door open, and know a brief happiness. So brief ! The thought of her approaching marriage was constantly with her : if thrust from her by Alendien's kisses, it returned, terrible and ruthless, the moment she was alone again. Though she hated the powerful Prince, yet must she do the will of her father, the King. Alas, Alendien ! Alas for our love. . . .

She would fall asleep with the pressing thought : " In nine days now. Nine days only " ; and the dear name opposing : " Alendien, my own " . . . and wake in the morning with the same thoughts, as though no interval of unconsciousness had intervened at all with grateful calm. . . .

The series of banquets that was to culminate in the wedding-banquet itself had begun. Orinda attended the first, and she was very pale and did not smile, and when she spoke, it was as though a sigh or sob stirred under her words. . . .

She became ill : despite the insistent bidding of her mind, the contrary bidding of her heart was imperative. To the doctors she told nothing ; and to her father, who bent down over her with dim eyes, she promised that she would soon become well, that the wedding might take place on the day appointed. The doctors could make

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nothing of her malady; but her father wondered. . . .

The days passed, and Orinda became no better; but sank slowly into a deeper weakness and listlessness. . . . And then, somehow, she told them the hidden reason: told them of Alendien, her meetings with him, her unquenchable love.—Out of a dream had she told the truth? or out of her profound weakness,—seeking, at length, protection from their soft, unending, multitudinous questionings? . . .

Sorely troubled, the King came to her:

“My child: you are killing yourself because of a dream!”

And he commanded that she be placed in a litter, and borne out to the Court of the Three Fountains. And when they reached the Court, and before the Door with the Three Padlocks, he said to her tenderly:

“See these bars and these padlocks: how worn they are with time and exposure! Not in your lifetime, I say, have they been displaced and this Door used. You shall see that I speak not idly.”

And he called for the Keeper of the Keys; and one by one the rusted padlocks were oiled and

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unlocked; and the Door finally, on resisting hinges, thrown wide.

Beyond stretched only the desert: smooth in its hollows; ridged evenly where it knew the touch of the wind; the desert—tawny-hued, calm, widening and darkening to the horizon. . . .

At first Orinda stared on it blankly, then she gave a sudden sharp cry, and her hands beat at her head: “But the fruit-trees;—the flowers and the lawn?” Then she sobbed convulsively: “Alendien!” and fell back in a swoon.

The following day, which otherwise was to have seen the wedding take place, saw instead the triumph of Orinda’s heart over her mind. . . .

Beldena was fanning gently with the long fan of jadella-feathers, and Orinda was watching her with half-closed eyes; and presently it seemed to her that Beldena’s hands gradually became slower in their action, and Beldena’s head gradually sank lower on her bosom.

Drawn then by she guessed not what deep and divine impulse, Orinda rose and walked slowly, giddily, out, into the Court of Flowers. There, a great scarlet rose, weary of life, dropped its burden in a scattering of petals: they lay on her

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hair and shoulders,—as though a young sunset-cloud had fallen in flakes upon her. . . .

She passed on: into the Court of the Three Fountains, and so to the Door with the Three Padlocks. But where were the padlocks, and where the broad bars!

With a sudden wild beating of her heart, Orinda pushed open the Door and passed thro'. About her, as before, the pleasance: the bright flowers, the shady grove of fruit-trees, the lawn and statuary. But gone were the dancers, the musicians, and the pavilion! Ah, where was Alendien?

She started forward, her lips forming the name, but no sound issuing. Then a sudden shudder took her; a sudden pricking of fear began at her heart.—Near-by, stood the tall motionless figure swathed in the long, many-folded cloak, his hands closely covering his face. . . . But this was no time for fear! He knew, he knew where Alendien was?

She ran to him: "Where is he? Tell me,—Alendien?"

Then the figure turned to her, and took away the covering hands,—and she was looking into a face of infinite loveliness and pity and understanding.

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Her inexplicable shuddering ceased on the instant; the pricking of fear died. Her being was flooded with a wonderful welling of relief, and she took his hands blindly, and clung to them.

"You know where he is?" she pleaded.

"Listen."

Faint on the still air came to her ears the soft tinkle of music and of voices singing.

"You hear? . . . They are—beyond."

Her eyes, with tears, sought further of him; so that he smiled and added:

"Alendien is with them—beyond."

She drew closer and clung to him again, whispering:

"Lead me,—lead me there." . . .

He extended an answering arm: the folds of his long cloak swung, gently encompassing her: "Come."

They entered, thus, the grove of fruit-trees, and passed shortly from view.