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P. C. Wren

Complete Works

Series Thirteen

The Complete Works of

P. C. WREN

(1875-1941)

Contents

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Version 1

The Complete Works of

P. C. WREN

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Complete Works of P. C. Wren

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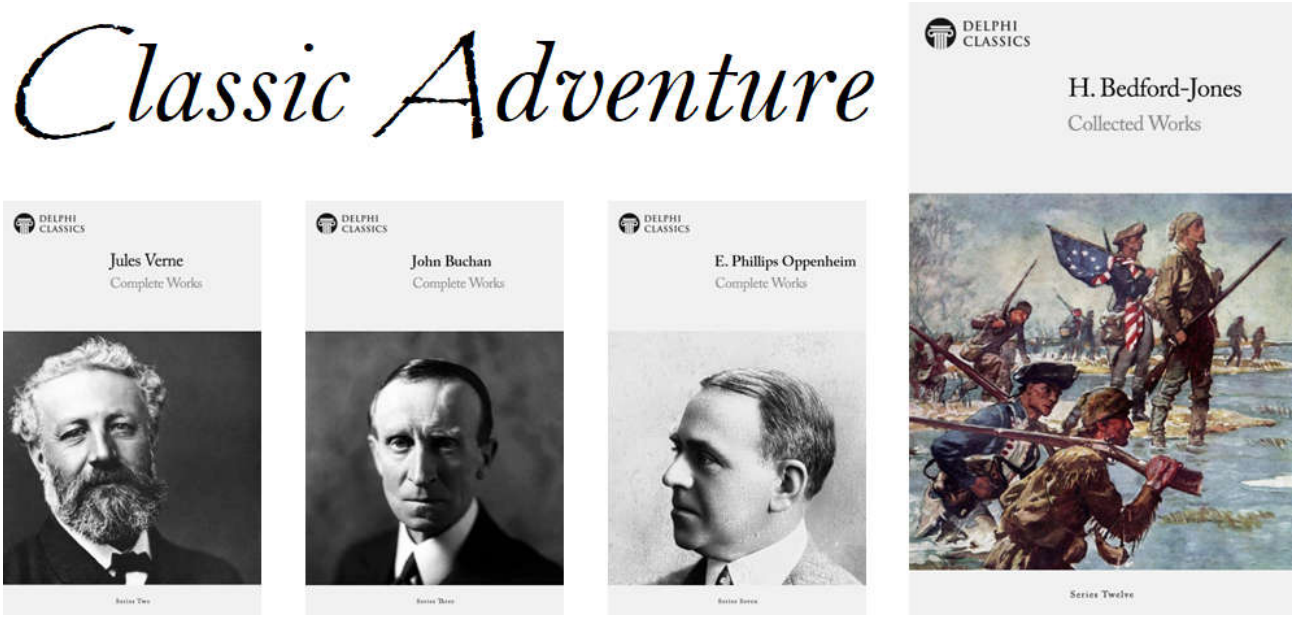
Classic Adventure



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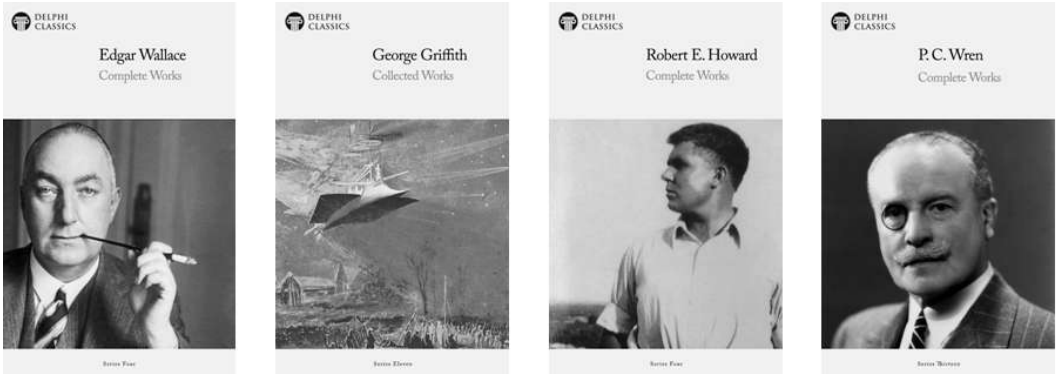

The Beau Geste Series

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The Novels

Deptford High Street, south London, c. 1870 — Percival Christopher Wren was born in Deptford in 1875, the son of a schoolmaster.

Deptford, today

Father Gregory (1913)

OR, LURES AND FAILURES

A TALE OF HINDUSTAN

First published in August 1913, Wren's first novel tells the story of Oxford-trained John Durham, who has founded the Chotapettah club, a home for Englishmen that were "failures" in Hindustan, regardless of how low they had fallen or the deeds they had done. One day Father Gregory— "the noblest and kindliest and gentlest of men" — comes seeking admission; he says he has heard of John Durham and his work and wishes to help. They form a partnership, with Durham looking after the physical needs of the members whilst Gregory tends to their spiritual welfare.

Among the failures are army men, barristers, parsons, schoolmaster, civilians, journalists, a professor and a doctor, many of whose downfall came through drink. Utilising biographical sketches and character studies, Wren unravels his story. However, there is a twist at the end, for in the last sentence Gregory reveals the truth about himself just before dying. Many reviewers called this "a real O. Henry ending" and one critic elaborated by saying, "For those who like a slap in the face at the end of such a tale, such a surprise will be enjoyed."

Critics welcomed this debut novel, with one reviewer calling it "a peculiarly interesting story and one to be unreservedly recommended"; whilst another noted that, "Mr. Wren writes with a profound pity for those who are broken upon life's wheel". However, the feeling wasn't unanimous, with one New York critic saying that, "Occasionally his tales are so highly colored as to verge on the ridiculous; this is notably the case in the accumulation of horrors that make up the introductory story."

Wren, close to the time of publishing his first novel.

CONTENTS

Oh you,
Earth's tender and impassioned few,
Take courage to entrust your love,
To Him so Named, who guards above
Its ends and shall fulfil;
Breaking the narrow prayers that may
Befit your narrow hearts, away
In His broad loving will.

E. B. BROWNING.

PART I. THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS IS HARD

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS

My Soul, sit thou a patient looker-on;
Judge not the Play before the Play is done:
Her plot hath many changes: every day
Speaks a new scene; the last act crowns the Play.

"THIS SAHIB APPEARS even madder than most of his kind," said the native station-master of Kondah to the booking-clerk who squatted beside him in the shade of the only building the station boasted.

"Without doubt," replied that young gentleman, who, by reason of much learning, little understanding, and less pay, entertained a most bitter hatred for those who had given him a free education and then omitted to see him suitably rewarded for accepting it. "How shall Educated Gent. B.A., pull on with thirty rupees a mensem?" he frequently inquired.

"Is not this the tenth day that he has left his tents and met the train?" pursued the station-master, as he paused in the massaging of his bare legs.

"Tenth or thirteenth, perhaps," replied the clerk, adding with pained, resigned piety: "I do not know why God made panthers, Pathans, and Sahibs." He then closed his eyes and resumed his favourite day-dream of wrecking a train full of Europeans — all gazetted Civil Officials for preference. That might teach them not to decoy one into becoming Educated Gent. B.A., by many long years of superhuman labour, and then turning one adrift to find one's own level.

Meanwhile, the object of the conversation of these worthies, a tall, lithe man in white riding-kit, patiently tramped the platform of the God-forsaken little wayside station, from end to end, awaiting the daily train that meanders through hundreds of miles of desert to the tin-shed station of Kondah, where it delivers over its rare passengers to the mercy of the native-state railway that takes them on, with more or less punctuality and safety, to another little junction in another big desert, and to high hopes of reaching a third junction whence real trains run to a great seaport and tall ships for Bombay and Home.

From end to end of the long low platform he tramped, doggedly, steadily, apparently oblivious of the smiting heat that poured down direct from the blasting midday sun above, and that poured up, radiated, from the stone platform and the corrugated-iron building below; apparently oblivious of the blinding glare reflected from the yellow sand of the limitless desert on either hand, from the white dust of the road, from the glittering metals of the narrow-gauge track, from the eye-searing whitewash of the station; oblivious of the two squatting, chewing, expectorating officials, unshorn, unkempt, unclean; of the crouching dungaree-clad coolie, the gaping crows, the wheeling, wailing kites; the limping, shivering pariah-dog; of everything in the brilliant red-hot world about him.

Anon the coolie arose and, with a heavy hammer, smote many blows upon a dangling yard of iron — producing a din that to an imaginative mind, at a considerable distance, might perhaps suggest the rapid ringing of a heavy bell.

At the sound, John Durham's stern, handsome face changed, relaxed, softened, and, as it was lit up with the glow of hope, expectation, and love, became more than

handsome — fine and noble. The lines of anxiety, sorrow, and sleeplessness seemed to vanish as he smiled and unconsciously thought a prayer.

He shaded his eyes with his hand, peered up the line through the blinding, dancing glare and heat-haze, till at length, afar off, he espied the tiny baby train that, capricious, erratic, wilful, played the chief rôle on the stage of this Gilbertian railway.

Why had the infernal thing stopped?

Was she in it?

Would she come?

Could she come?

Should she come?

The old, old question. Had she the right to leave the ruffian, the brute, the drunkard; the scoundrel who ill-treated, hated, insulted, and shamed her, and to come to the lover, the friend, the man who worshipped and adored her; to come to him who would give his life for her happiness, his very soul for her welfare?

What! — Because of the empty words, the letter of the law of a mediaeval man-made ceremony — should a splendid woman be bound for ever to a gross beast who hated her?

What! — Because she had been bought and sold like a dog or a horse by a wealthy evil sensualist from a bankrupt greedy father — should she have no right to save herself, to escape from a hell upon earth?

What! — Because she had been forced and compelled as a girl of sixteen, a mere child, was she bound to submit to degradation, misery, bondage of mind, body, and soul for ever?

Whom God hath joined together!... Away with the lying cant!... Whom two villainous scoundrels have joined together by paying a fee to a hireling fellow-man to mumble a few words in a church.

Marriages made in Heaven to celestial music!... Sickening humbug! A marriage made in a club-bar to the chink of gold and crackle of bank-notes or the scrape of a cheque-signing pen....

If ever God joined a couple in the bonds of undying love and mutual faith and honour, He joined John Durham and Joan Rayven during that golden delirium, when, for the first time, after five years of solid misery, her unspeakable husband — entirely for his own purposes *bien entendu* — had let her out of his sight and sent her to the Hills by herself.

Joan Rayven — beautiful, proud, witty, tender Joan; noble, brave, accomplished, intellectual Joan; fine gentlewoman — now only twenty-one, and for five years the prey of a Beast....

William Pooch — gross, ugly, vulgar Bill Pooch; coarse, ignorant, brutal Pooch; drunken, sensual Pooch, the rich and evil ruffian — aged fifty-five, and for five years the cruel owner of Joan Rayven!

How his blood boiled as he thought of them.... Was that infernal toy train never coming?... Could she be in it?...

Surely God never gave men such joy as would be Durham's if she, she herself, radiant, dainty, beautiful, stepped from that train. No, the mind could not bring itself to believe in the possibility of such exquisite, ineffable bliss....

Fancy taking Joan over to the camp until to-morrow's train arrived from Pettah Junction and prepared to return across the Native State to that other lost spot, whence one could strike the big main line.

Fancy making tea for Joan....

Fancy finding Joan there, her own beautiful wonderful self — John Durham's wife, in the sight of God, for ever and beyond....

No! Such happiness could not be in this evil, dreary world, surely.

Fancy having Joan to love, honour, obey; to guard, shelter, and cherish; to serve and for ever to worship and adore.... To have Joan for companion, friend, and wife, with never a parting here or hereafter....

No — this is not Heaven, and Heaven itself could hold out no joy to compare with such perfect bliss....

The train whistled impudently, mockingly, impishly, and started forward.

The pariah-dog, clear-eyed and mangy, limping and shivering in the sun, left the opposite platform, and painfully jerked its pink-patched, hideous body, step by step, across the track.

To Durham's pitying eye, it looked the last and lowest of all created things, a crawling concentration of misery, disease, and degradation — and he made a mental note that he would come back and mercifully shoot it, if he were again disappointed, as doubtless he would be, alas! to-day and on many morrows.

He did not shoot it — unfortunately.

If he had, the lives of hundreds of people would have run differently, and of two would have been saved.

So marvellous and mysterious are the workings of Providence — or the Happenings of Chance.

The infant train stopped once more and, in the dancing glare, the engine appeared to make grimaces at John Durham.

It screamed derisively.

The Englishman ground his teeth and shook his riding-whip at it, for suspense, anxiety, hope, and fear, mingling, were merging into agony of soul.

With a whoop of defiance, the spoilt child of the railway backed and slowly receded, squealing, as though in sheer delight at torturing a Sahib.

With an expression of anger, Durham strode towards it, sprang off the platform and hurried in pursuit. In a few minutes the train halted, resumed its journey to the station, and reached the man whom it had seemed to mock.

Swinging himself on the footboard of the only first-class carriage, Durham climbed up and looked into each of its two compartments.

Empty.

Of course.

With a heavy sigh that was almost a sob, he dropped to the ground again and strode across to his tents — to live through another twenty-four hours at the very least, awaiting the woman for whom he had already waited a week, and for whom he would wait another three weeks — if necessary.

God grant the strain of waiting, of suspense, anxiety, fear, doubt, and hope-deferred — did not send him mad, to wander away in the desert just before she came.

Had he been all his life in the little camp beside the tiny station in the dreadful desert?

Was he dead and was this really Hell? Hell where he was doomed to meet a train and a shattering disappointment daily for a thousand million æons?...

Come — this would not do. He was taking it harder and harder every day. What would it be by the end of the month if he went on like this? What would be his condition on the last day if she had not come even then, and so would never come?...

He must do something at once — yes — he would go and see for the thousandth time that all was right in her tent, the tent that she herself, living and breathing, would enter, please God.

Raising the *chick* curtain he entered the canvas bower that he had prepared for her, removed his *topi* reverently, and looked round in search of opportunity for improvement.

It was a fair and dainty interior, and reflected credit upon his taste.

Walled and roofed in olive green, with a thick, patternless, olive-green carpet, it was cool and restful to the eye, a wonderful contrast to the screaming glare without.

A fresh young palm in a green tub provided a different and even cooler green. A tiny camp-cot, with snowy frilled pillow and embroidered sheet, was covered with a green eiderdown quilt, for the nights were chill and damp with a heavy dew in that — by day — red-hot desert.

On a miniature dressing-table was a belaced dainty cover on which stood a little silver lamp with a green silk shade, assorted silver toilet ware, and a mirror. A long, low hammock-chair bore green cushions, lace-covered, and on a low, carven table a green vase contained the results of the man's pitiful attempts at flower-arranging, the which might have been more successful had the God-forsaken spot boasted more flowers. On a book-stand by the chair lay her favourite Browning, Francis Thompson, and Herrick, bound in dull, soft, green leather. A beloved and cherished picture was fastened to the tent-wall above the bed. The place breathed of refinement, delicacy, simplicity, and virtue.

John Durham sighed heavily, changed the big silver frame, containing her portrait and his, from the table to the book-stand, and taking the vase of "flowers" — mainly leaves and hedge-blossom — left the tent.

Entering his own, he flung himself down on his rough camp-bed and groaned in anguish and weariness of soul.

Suspense, doubt, anxiety, and fear for the woman he loved, were wearing him out....

Another twenty-four hours to kill somehow, before the next train arrived....

What should he do if she had not come by the last day of the month?... Shoot himself?... He might be able to live without her if that were all, since he had her portrait, her love, and — memories... but he could not go on living and know her to be at the mercy of Pooch, suffering.... Joan the prey of "Bill" Pooch. Joan! No — he could not live knowing that, and feeling it every moment of the day.

Would it not be a kindness, if she came not, simply to go and kill Pooch?

No, certainly not. She loved him, John Durham unworthy, and life would be an even more intolerable burden to her if he were a hunted fugitive from the law, a long-sentence convict, or an executed felon.

Perhaps she would come....

Once again, what were her very words, spoken on that dark morning when they parted, she to return to her brutal proprietor in the far North-East and he to his district in the South?

"For three months, John, I will try and forget you — my true husband though you are.... I will try and forget you and forgive him.... I will do my very utmost with him and for him, though it is hopeless.... I will honestly warn him, too. Then I will decide — and if there be no change, and I can see hope of none, I will come to you, my Love, my Husband, my Own Man.... Give me the route and details in writing, and I will learn it by heart.... Wait at the place — Kondah, isn't it? — as you suggest, throughout the month of December.... If I do not come between the first day and the

last, you will know that I shall never come, John, and that you are never to see me again.... Do not dream of writing to me — I have never yet received a letter unopened by my husband, though I have scarcely spoken to a man till God sent me you, Beloved.... Nor dare I write to you. You must simply wait and wait that month — if I am worth it... and perhaps wait in vain, for I will stay with him if he will make it possible.... But you would not fail me, John!... *Think of my reaching that lost spot in the desert and finding — no one.* And with him hunting me!... Oh, John, you would not fail me?...” And he had replied:

“My brave and beautiful Beloved, my wife in the sight of God — not death himself shall keep me away. There is no power on earth could stop me, nor draw me from the spot. I would not leave it to save myself from torture and death.... From the first day of December to the last, three months hence, I will be at Kondah in the desert — *happen what may*!...”

“And if he should ever find us, John... “ she had faltered.

“We will face him and Fate too, my dearest.... I do not advise him to find us.... But if he does — what of it? *No* punishment could count for a moment against the joy of our admission to the Paradise that will be ours....”

“I am afraid, John.... He is so cunning, so remorseless, so unscrupulous....”

“He shall never find us, Beloved — Light of my Life.... Nor can he pursue you if you choose your moment well and follow these directions.... You will be absolutely lost in an hour or two.... Secure that hour or two in advance of him, Sweetheart, and nothing can come between us.... Nor shall anything separate us, once we have met.... I will not plead with you for myself, but, oh, my own Darling, think well of the awful years ahead, and you but a girl, before you decide to stay with him....”

And they had parted in the dark, dank dawn, groping, groping blindly, with dimmed eyes and souls.

Would she come?

Could she come?

Should she come?

And the world-old arguments, pleas, and casuistry recommenced.

All night the man wrestled with his conscience, reasoned against his intelligence, strove with himself.

“Right is right and Wrong is wrong,” said Conscience. “Two wrongs never made a right.”

“I do right to save a woman from such a life of torture as the male mind cannot conceive, to help her to escape from a hell upon earth, to translate her from a Purgatory of hate to a Paradise of love,” replied the man. “If it be wrong let it *be* wrong; there are many wrongs nobler than some ‘rights.’”

“You can’t be truly happy for long,” said Intelligence. “You will be social outcasts, lepers, pariahs, passed by on the other side by Those-who-have-never-been-found-out. You will always have the shadow of a wronged and vengeful husband upon you, and the shadow of a great sin between you.”

“What is Society to me?” replied the man. “I care no more what chattering human apes are saying than what mosquitoes and crows are saying. The farther we are from the ‘World’ the better pleased we shall be.... And who is the more entitled to vengeance, the man who tortures the woman or the man who saves her? Who is the more ‘wronged,’ the drunken, brutal, husband or the poor victim, the woman he should cherish and guard? Whose is the sin, his or ours? Shall she stay in the same house with him and his native mistresses?... And the reptile keeps within the letter of the vile law, which will not let her divorce him unless he beats her. But for that, he

would beat her.... A wronged husband!... The shadow of a sin!... And what of the wronged wife and the shadow and substance of five years of brutality and shame and torture...” and the suffering lover groaned aloud.

In the morning he groomed himself carefully and, sleepless, prepared to visit the scene of his daily sentry-go once more. The train would not come for many hours, but time would pass more quickly on the platform than in the tent, and the steady tramping was sedative — an anodyne.

Quitting his own roughly furnished abode he entered “Joan’s Bower,” as he called the big new tent, replaced the bowl of leaves and tree-blossoms, gave a few touches here and there, breathed a wordless prayer for her welfare, and turned his face to the dreary, lonely little station....

The cool dew-washed morning had no freshness for him, the new-born day no promise, the rising sun no soul-light. Dark presentiment oppressed his mind, and foreboding clutched his heart. Something would happen that day and it would not be the arrival of Joan.... Something would happen....

A creature of the lizard family, a huge ugly brute, a yard long, ran across his path and vanished into its hole. How he loathed those — what were they — iguanas?... Something of the kind.... Hideous reptiles! — Whatever might be the scientific name for them, a jolly good everyday one would be “Pooch.”... Yes, he’d get his gun and go shooting Pooches in the desert if she did not come to-day....

What nonsense was he talking now? This wouldn’t do at all. Nerves going! His gun — what had he intended to do with his gun? Ah yes, that poor wretched pi-dog — he had said he would put it out of its misery. Should he go back and get it while he remembered it, and shoot the poor beast at once?

John Durham hung irresolute, half turned to go back, and looked towards his tents. As he stood, his fate, and that of the woman he loved better than life, hung in the balance, as did the fate of men unborn.

No. He could not face those empty tents again just now — time enough when he had to do so....

In the narrow shadow of the low platform, the pi-dog lay shivering, jerking spasmodically, moaning. Saliva dripped from its jaws as it made unwholesome noises, long, low, direful notes of misery and agony. At times it raised itself painfully and howled at the sky, snapped at nothing, and collapsed....

Reaching the centre of the near platform, John Durham stepped down on to the line to cross over to the far one. He almost trod on the pi-dog. Emitting a wild yelp it sprang at him with surprising agility and the strength of madness.

For a second it dangled from his wrist and hand, through which its filthy fangs met like the teeth of a steel-trap.

And John Durham realized that he had been bitten by a mad dog.

Well, nobody else should be bitten by that particular specimen at all events. Seizing the scruff of its neck in his powerful right hand he bore it to where the heavy iron hammer of the bell-ringer hung from a nail and did what was necessary.

He then gave thought to himself.

Bitten by a mad dog! He must fly for dear life to the Pasteur Institute at Kasauli, many hundreds of miles away, at once, of course. In the hydrophobia hospital alone was salvation from an unthinkable death.

Kasauli at once. Next train from here would go at...

Joan.

He could not leave Kondah till Joan came.

She might arrive at any time, now. How *could* he go?

Joan....

Kasauli....

How could he desert Joan?...

How could he sit at Kondah while the poison worked and he became even as the dead cur, that now lay there affronting the daylight, had been a moment ago — a foaming, barking Horror....

To wait for Joan and... hydrophobia, madness, death?

To flee to Kasauli and... salvation, health, life?

Was he to sit there waiting the most horrible death a man can die?

He must wire to her.

He must not. It would in all probability be received by her husband — *and suppose Joan had already started!...*

No. The issue was simple and there was no evasion — his plighted word and death, or unfaithfulness and life.

But could he not go, and leave his tents standing all ready for Joan if she came — with a letter entrusted to the station-master. "I have been bitten by a mad dog and have gone to Kasauli. Follow me there."

No. Death a thousand times.

"Follow me there!" Pah! With a maddened brute of a husband in pursuit; with no notion as to how to get to Kasauli; perhaps with no money. Quite likely she would leave her home with no more of her hated husband's money than would suffice to bring her to Kondah.

Well — he could leave money with the station-master, as well as the letter.... And would she ever receive either, if she came?

Most probably not.... The station-master would use great intelligence in being sufficiently unintelligent to part with the money and letter.... And then again, her words to him, "*Think of my reaching that spot and finding no one!... And with him hunting me!... Oh*, *John*, *you would not fail me?...*"

And his solemn oath that he would *not* fail her....

She trusted her lover absolutely. Should he "let her down"? Death rather — a thousand times. He would stay — and give *pros* and *cons* no further thought. There was always the chance that he was not infected with the virus — and he would take the chance.

Within a few seconds of being bitten, John Durham's mind was made up.

"I cannot possibly communicate with her," said he. "I cannot possibly desert her. I remain for the month, or till she comes." And he strode across to his camp to wash and cleanse his mangled hand.

He would omit no precautions and then the rest was with God.

With a penknife-blade and the flame of a big lamp he did his best at cauterization, scoured the burns with permanganate of potash, and then applied a paste obtained by mixing witch-hazel, boracic acid, and zinc oxide from his medicine-chest.

Feeling a little sick and shaky he returned to the station and resumed his tramp until the train arrived.

This he did for many days, to the growing wonder of the station "staff."

As the days passed, John Durham was conscious of an ever-growing sickness, terrible pains in the head and throat, and a difficulty in swallowing, and once desiring to speak to the station-master, he found his voice a horrible croak, almost a growl.

One day the coolie flung a pail of water swishing along the front of the iron shed called a booking-office, and John Durham, leaping round at the sound, saw the water and fell to the ground in a convulsive fit....

As the days passed, he came to see the world around him as a great race-course along which thundered towards him three giant horses, one of which bore Joan, another bore New Year's Day, and the third, Death.... Death on a pale horse.... At times he could most distinctly see them coming, with the Pale Horse leading, and, as the daily train drew in, he could hear the awful thunder of their hoofs.

Which would reach him first?

One day he could not walk up and down the platform, but must sit on a bench and wait with what patience he might — for he was growing very weak, starving, by reason of the difficulty of swallowing.

Could Joan yet come in time for Pasteur to save him?

On the next morning he only got a few yards from his tent, fell, and was obliged to crawl back.

On the following morning he did not leave his tent at all....

And on that same day a beautiful woman, whose gentle face was marred and strained by a look of terror, the mask of expectant fear of a hunted animal, entered a reserved ladies'-compartment of the Calcutta mail.

She wore a white hat and a light dust-cloak, though those were not the garments in which she had left her home, and she possessed a ticket for a place to which she did not go. No man entered this carriage during the journey to the first junction, and yet a man left it at that place — a young, slim, clean-shaven gentleman arrayed in a big *topi*, riding-kit, and a light overcoat. He took the first train that departed on the other line, and yet no young man left it, though a uniformed nurse quitted the compartment that the young man had entered.

Eventually she caught the toy train for Kondah, though no uniformed nurse arrived there.

But, on the last day of December, a beautiful woman whose gentle face was strained and marred by a look of anxiety and fear, and who wore a black hat and brown holland coat, stepped from that toy train on to the Kondah platform.

As she realized, at last, that no one was there to meet her, the beautiful face went deathly white, her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and she swayed on her feet. Then suddenly she caught sight of Durham's tents, flushed, smiled, and said:

"He thought it best not to meet me on the platform for fear of possible fellow-travellers and gossip."

Then, having put her dressing-case in charge of the station-master, she walked towards the tents — slowly because her heart was drumming in an alarming manner and breathing had become an exercise of pain and difficulty.

As she approached the nearest tent and whispered "John" she was answered by the sound of a horrible crowing bark — that was not the barking of a dog....

* * * * * *

Some few months later the poor lady's only child was born in the Burrapore Lunatic Asylum and registered as John Durham — for in her more lucid moments, the mad-woman declared Durham to be her name, and prayed that she might be protected from one William Pooch should he arrive to claim and seize her before her real husband, John Durham, could come and join her.

Since John Durham — a bachelor, was well known to have died of hydrophobia, months before, the authorities communicated incontinent with Mr. William Pooch, and that gentleman came and claimed his wife.

The first part of the punishment he inflicted, the mere beginning thereof, was such sequestration and disposal of the worshipped and idolized baby as might enable her to rest assured that she would never see it again.

PART II. THIRTY YEARS AFTER. — THE LURES AND THE FAILURES

... “We have done with Hope and Honour, we are lost to love and Truth
We are dropping down the ladder, rung by rung”...

CHAPTER I

SOME FAILURES

Frères humains, qui après nous vivez,
N'ayez les coeurs contres nous endurciz
Car, si pitié de nous pauvres avez
Dieu en aura plustost de vous merciz.

* * * * *

Ne soyez donc de nostre confrairie
Mais priez Dieu que tous nous vueille absouldre.
Francois Villon. (14 —.)

IN THE CARD-ROOM, Major Cecil Saxon Barronby, R.F.A. (cashiered), partnered the Honourable Reginald Burke, Trooper (bought out), against Mr. Henry Hoalke, I.C.S. (dismissed), and the Reverend Montague Dalcane, M.A., B.D. (unfrocked).

Jack Pontreuil, Barr.-at-Law (disbarred), looked on and wagered enormous sums with himself.

The pyjamas of the Reverend Montague lacked buttons, and the feet of Major Barronby lacked socks.

As the Major's trembling right hand left his trim moustache, to play his card, he made a motion as if to bring his shirt-cuffs into sight from beneath the sleeves of his cotton-coat, and incurred the acrimonious criticism of the sour-visaged Mr. Hoalke — a mean-looking person who ate hungrily at his finger-nails.

"You can't get blood out of a stone, Barronby," said he.

"No?... You might get some out of a Hoalke though. What are you driving at?" inquired the Major, raising his heavy face, with its heavy moustache, heavy bloodshot eyes, and heavy stare. He was wearing his entire wardrobe — a white suit, black silk neckerchief, and dancing-pumps.

Hoalke, a wizened pimply person with scant sandy hair and straggling beard, flinched before the steady glare of the Major, but, with a kind of *gamin* impudence and rat-courage, replied:

"You can't get blood out of a stone and you can't shoot your linen when you've got no shirt."

"No, and you can't shoot a snarling cur when you've got no gun — more's the pity," was the rejoinder.

"No — but you can kick him though," observed the Honourable Reginald Burke, in a soft and silky voice, and brought his monocle to bear upon the ex-ornament of the Indian Civil Service. Also he raised an exceedingly shapely foot, clad in an expensive, though ancient and well-worn boot, drew up his well-cut, well-creased, though ancient and well-worn trouser, crossed his legs, and regarded the elevated foot with affection.

"Yes, you can kick him all right," he sighed and prepared to rise....

"Whisht! Hush! Here's Father Gregory," said the — formerly — Reverend Montague Dalcane, who could see down the great verandah from where he sat.

All looked towards the doorless doorway, and all rose as one, upon the entrance of a small, slim, old priest, clad in a long black gown, with a silken cap upon his silver hair and a silver cross on the black cord that encircled his neck.

His face was faultlessly beautiful and unspeakably gentle, kind, and sweet. Being beautiful it was not devoid of strength.

"Pray sit down, my children," said he hastily, as the men rose. "Don't let me interrupt for one second. I'm only passing through to the go-down."

The players bowed and resumed their seats.

It was noticeable that no signs of the outbreak of temper and hostilities survived the passage of Father Gregory through the card-room.

"Whose play?" asked the once Reverend Montague, a huge fat mountain of a man with a huge fat face, on which was an unfading kindly smile, the face that women trusted and children turned to instinctively for sympathy.

"Your lead, my dear Hoalke...."

"Boy!" called the Honourable Reginald Burke, in a musical tenor, and, as the servant approached, said:

"Bring me a whisk... er... brand... ah... *glass of water....* Stony-broke and mustn't write chits for luxuries, while on the free list, what?" he murmured, as the man turned to go.

"And four cigarettes," added Dalcane, raising his voice.

Three pairs of eyes regarded the erstwhile reverend gentleman with interest and surprise, as the servant returned and handed him a plate whereon he might lay the requisite money — for, not being at the moment on the free list, Dalcane was in the class that could procure luxuries by paying cash.

"Yes, my breth... er... dear boys, I've got a four-*anna* piece somewhere, and it's my birthday. I wish they were four bottles of champagne I could offer you; I do indeed," he continued, and struggled to insert his fat hand into the breast pocket of his pyjama jacket.

"I know of nothing cheaper than wishes, Friar Tuck," remarked Mr. Henry Hoalke with an unpleasant sneer. "There are people who establish a reputation for generosity by means of lavish gifts of good wishes, congratulations, promises, compliments, and such-like...."

"There are people who establish a reputation for mean-hearted malice and curmudgeonry, by means of constantly making beastly and ungentlemanly remarks," replied Major Barronby, again fixing the heavy insolent stare on Hoalke, who snarled like a dog.

"Oh, come on, Barronby — your lead," interposed Dalcane, and silence fell upon the little group of detrimentals until the arrival of the cigarettes.

"Thanks awfully, Padre Sahib," murmured Burke to the ex-priest, as he lighted the gift and blew a long slow cloud of smoke with an air of great enjoyment. "First smoke I've had since Sunday morning."

"Here's *to* you, Dalcane," said the Major, doing similarly. "May your shadow never grow less and... ," fearing that he might possibly hurt the feelings of his enormously fat friend by what appeared an allusion to his bulk, he stopped abruptly and hastily concluded, "and always back winners at long prices."

"I trust we break no new rule of the establishment by smoking cigarettes before lunch?" sneered Hoalke. "One is sometimes apt to forget for a moment, that one is in a combined nursery-reformatory and monastic-penitentiary.... Might as well be in a damned almshouse and done with it."

"If you don't like it, Hoalke, you can always leave it to its fate, you know," observed Reginald Burke languidly, and added, in a gentle murmur:

"Wonder if my last pair of boots *would* burst if I kicked you, in the name of common decency and of John Durham, our noble Founder."

"Yes, we could struggle on without you, y'know, Hoalke," corroborated the Major...

"Shall we have another rubber," interposed the ex-priest, again endeavouring to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"No — not if we are to change partners, thanks," replied Major Barronby, "I might get the Hoalke," and, with an elaborate shudder at the bare idea, he rose from the table and stretched his tall, powerful frame with a mighty yawn.

"Tell you what, Burke," said he, "I'll play you a hundred up and stake my neckerchief against your other pair of socks.... But I shall have to wear a white handkerchief till quarter-day if I lose, though, and they're beastly inadequate for that purpose. But I want some socks badly...."

"Anything you like, Barry," replied Reginald Burke, who had never refused a wager nor a challenge in the whole of his misspent life, "but there's an appalling hole in the heel of one of them, you know — more hole than sock really.... Yes, you might call the thing a hole with a sock hanging on to it, perhaps.... It's a sock within the meaning of the act though, and presents an unbroken front to the world, even in shoes. If you wear boots why... perfectly doggy garment. Come on," and the rash wagerers departed to the billiard-room with a nod to the late Reverend Montague Dalcane and a careful ignoring of Mr. Henry Hoalke, who, according to Burke, was the Club's only "outsider," had the soul of a weasel, and used the standards of a pawnbroker's clerk.

"Sorry I insulted you just now, Dalcane," remarked the gentleman in question as he ceased biting at his nails, rose, and lounged to the big French window that opened on the trim velvet lawn of the Club garden, "I've no liver, you know, and precious little stomach, practically no alimentary system left, in fact.... I am ill — damned ill — and very miserable."

"Not a word, Hoalke, my dear fellow, I beseech you!" hastily replied the unfrocked clergyman. "We're none of us lucky or very happy, but I am fortunate in the possession of the most aggressive health. To be ill as well as down, must be awful, and besides, you didn't insult me in the least.... You have my sincerest sympathy.... I wish I could — er — help you in any way, but" — very wistfully— "I am not in a position to offer ghostly comfort or the consolations of religion nowadays.... But if you'd care to talk — I am a good listener, and I know it does one good sometimes. But there! Father Gregory could accomplish with perfect success what I could hardly begin—"

"You are a good man, Padre, and a gentleman," replied Hoalke, looking round, "and I'd like to know your story."

"Oh, I have no story, my dear Hoalke," was the reply, "no lurid past wherewith to titillate your ears.... I am just a faithless, unfrocked priest — a poor wretch whose Faith failed him as his eyesight or hearing might have done.... The plain tale of my life is not a bit dramatic or interesting."

"Well, the history of every man, in a place like this, must be dramatic and interesting, I should think," replied the ex-Civilian. "How else could they be in this harbour for first-class hulks; this home for lost, strayed, stolen, and starving dogs of good pedigree; this almshouse for decayed and rotten gentlemen?... Interesting!... Good Lord, we're the finest collection of freaks and failures in the world — and all men of former position and means."

"Yes," agreed Dalcane, "we're a unique institution, I admit — and I love the place."

"You *do*?" ejaculated the other. "Well, it chokes *me*.... I loathe it.... It brands and burns me.... I feel I am a charity pauper living on other people's bounty."

Since that was precisely Mr. Hoalke's position, the sensation was not remarkable.

"It has one merit, I admit," he continued, "there are no women here, and we are saved from *that* curse at least — and I believe the married men are the most grateful of all for that huge 'small mercy.' I can stick it while it is a monastic and celibate institution—"

"Like a Seamen's Rest — a refuge for distressed *marrieders*, what?" tittered the fat man, who loved his little joke.

"Yes, I can just bear it while no woman can set foot in the place," repeated Hoalke, and, as he did so for over a quarter of a century, it is to be supposed that he spoke the truth upon this occasion.

"But you never know what Durham may do next," he continued, "he's quite capable of having a new wing built and reserving it for well-born Magdalens and generally detrimental and damaged gentlewomen."

"Oh, no," dissented the other, "Durham might very well endow such a place elsewhere if he had the means to spare, and have it run by the right type of philanthropic women, but he'd hardly go in for a mixed club.... A cock-and-hen club has its difficulties under normal circumstances, but *here*... ! And after all we *are* a Club and not an almshouse or pauper asylum."

"Nominally at any rate. Some of us work and many of us are not paupers — but Durham must run the Club at fearful loss."

"Of course he does. He loses thousands annually, and I know Father Gregory puts his all into it — but it remains a Club in spite of that.... The committee manages everything but the finances, and we pay according to our means — and when we have no means we can run up unlimited bills for pure necessities.... But he'd probably eject, if not prosecute, anyone who tried to swindle him and to live here at free quarters when he had any money.... I believe those who have means pay as much as they would at the Calcutta Club, or the Byculla, or the Club of Western India."

"Yes.... One must confess that Durham is a wise man as well as a noble one," agreed Hoalke with apparent reluctance.

"There's no denying he's doing a grand work of charity and philanthropy without pauperizing anybody.... One is expected to earn what one can, and pay a portion of it — and to obey the Club rules — or go. But they irk me at times, and I feel I'm a damned prisoner, a pauper pensioner on his bounty, and a—"

"But, Good Heavens, man!" interrupted the ex-priest. "Think of it. *Think* of it — and then of the bazaar and workhouse that he has saved us from — and keeps us from! Half of us would have died in the gutter and the other half in the infirmary, excepting those who died in jail. Think of it!... An assured and permanent home in a magnificent Club; the society of men of one's own class; privacy, comfort, peace, and all the necessities of decent life. You can't expect a man of Durham's wisdom to offer flagrant luxuries for nothing — or little. We should be spoilt and pauperized loafers in a week."

"Well, that may be all very true, but I wish to God I could come into a fortune and get away from it all," rejoined Hoalke, biting fiercely at his finger-nails once more.

"I wish to God I could come into a fortune and pay Durham all I owe him of money and something of what I owe him of gratitude and love, by placing the balance in his hands to enable him to extend his work here. I know it cuts him to the heart to

‘blackball’ a deserving applicant for — er — membership,” replied Dalcane, and added, “Hullo! There goes the Professor,” as a strange figure passed the big windows, crossed the wide verandah, and left its cool shadow for the blinding sunshine of the lawn. The Professor wore a long, loose bath-gown of brilliant mauve and white striped towelling, and a pair of Japanese slippers of plaited grass. In one hand he bore a butterfly-net and in the other a glass jam-jar with a string handle.

A very fat servant, faint but pursuing, waved a battered and dingy white *sun-topi*, overtook its owner, and presented it to him.

“Eh, what? What’s this?” inquired the Professor with polite interest, “Hat? Head? Precisely. I see your point. Sun. Doubtless. I thank you,” and the Professor hung the *topi* on his arm as poets’ milkmaids do, or do not, their dainty pails, placed his jam-jar in it, and pursued the even tenor of his way.

“Were I a betting man I would offer odds that Dr. Foy will be on his track within two minutes,” observed the Reverend Montague Dalcane. “If he isn’t, he’s not in the Club.”

Even as he spoke, a little, rotund, rubicund personage with a most unascetic countenance and “figure,” burst from the porch and propelled himself with remarkable speed in the direction of the errant and bare-headed Professor. His little legs positively twinkled as he bolted across the lawn in pursuit of his beloved Aunt, his Old Hoss, his Geezer, as he indifferently and impartially termed the Professor, whom he watched over as a mother does a wilful toddling child.

“Hi, Auntie! ye silly ol’ hoss,” he roared. “Putt ye’r bonnet on ye’r silly ol’ head and come back. Ye can’t catch tiddlers in a butterfly-net, and ye can’t keep butterflies in a jam-pot without a lid.”

Overtaking his quarry, who had stopped, turned, and peered in his direction, he continued, between pants:

“And ye can’t go disgracin’ this Club, prancin’ through the scenery in y’r shameless, flauntin’ God-forsaken fandango of a night-shirt. Come home, ye silly ol’ beldam, an’ dhress y’rself like a Christian sowl and a dacent woman.”

The Professor raised a didactic finger and opened the argument as the doctor seized the ancient *topi* and placed it at a most rakish angle over the weak and watery eye that fixed him with a severe gaze.

“My dear Foy,” he began, “my dear good foolish Foy — I am not a Christian and souls do not dress. And as I have told you before when you have applied absurd epithets to my name, or suggested an — er — femalely avuncular relationship between us, I am *not* a woman, alas! I am not a beldam, and I am certainly not your Aunt. Also this is not a night-gown and I have sold all my other garments to Hoalke, I believe, for the wherewithal to buy books that are positively necessary to me, if I am ever to settle the question of the Origin of Bacteria or the—” and here the flow of his eloquence was stayed by reason of his rapid propulsion in the direction of the verandah at the end of the bath-gown cord, which his tormentor had seized, untied, and commenced to use as a tow-rope.

“Cease, my dear Foy,” he cried, when he had recovered breath. “Leave me alone. I am going to the pond. I want some *amœbæ*.”

“Ye want y’r silly ol’ head smacked,” replied Dr. Foy. “Come home, Maria. Come home, ye baste, or I’ll carry ye.”

“Now, my dear good Foy,” protested the Professor, effectually stopping his enforced retirement by the simple process of sitting down, “am I, or am I not, a sane adult person, capable of conducting all the affairs of life with discretion and promptitude. Did I or did I not—”

"Yah! ye contrairey ol' schamer," roared the foiled captor, "*Did ye or did ye not!* Did ye dhrink the hair restorer I gave ye for y'r silly ole head, and rub the chlorodyne I gave ye to dhrink into y'r balmy pate, eh?... Did ye spend an hour last night puffin' y'r silly ol' bellows trying to blow out the electric light, eh?... Did ye put y'r omelette into y'r pocket an' y'r book into y'r mouth, this morning, eh?... An' five minnuts afther, did ye put the match in y'r mouth an' throw away the cheroot, eh?... Who put his socks over his boots?... Who stropped his shaving brush and rubbed his face with a razor?... Who threw money to the ducks because he'd forgot to bring 'em any bread?... Who put a copper in the vegetable dish when the servant offered it him at dinner?... Who posted his letters in the filter for a week?"... and suddenly wheeling round, Dr. Foy placed the end of the cord over his shoulder, gripped it with two hands, and commenced to tow the recumbent, struggling, and protesting Professor into port.

In port, the strange procession of two, tug and derelict, came to an anchor, and the tug cast off — at the unspoken bidding of the harbour-master. In less nautical language, Dr. Foy and the Professor encountered Father Gregory in the porch, and unto him did the captive appeal as unto Caesar, on his smiling cry of "Children, children! not quarrelling nor teasing each other, I hope."

"No, Father, he's teasing *me*," accused the Professor eagerly. "Make him let me go, Father — he's pulling me violently — ah — north-east by east and I want to go south-west by west to the pond to get some *amœbæ* and—"

Dr. Foy had become very gentle at sight of Father Gregory.

Every one became gentle and mild in the presence of Father Gregory.

Those who did not actually become better, tried to look so, which, if an hypocrisy, was at least a tribute.

"Yes, Father," he chimed in, as he released his victim, "and the pore demented owld Biddy was goin' in the mornin' sun wid his ould turnip-head bare, an' him dhressed as ye see 'um — in a shameless, bedizened, purple night-shirt, majenta pyjamas insoide out, an' shtraw shlippers — the schamer!"

"Well, well — let him come with me and I'll find him a nice long overcoat and a pair of Durham's shoes," said Father Gregory, with his slow, sweet smile, "and then we'll both go to the pond and trap or shoot *amœbæ*.... I'll see he doesn't fall in or get his feet wet, or try and put a snake in his pocket for future investigation. Come along, Professor—"

"Sure, the baste'll be safe wid ye, Father dear, but it's an aggravatin' ol' Jezebel to be runnin' afther all day...." And the warm-hearted doctor returned to the Club hospital and the bedside from which he had rushed at sight of his beloved Professor inviting sunstroke, fever, and ridicule....

"Durham, my dear son," said Father Gregory a minute later, as he entered the office-room and sanctum of the Founder, Secretary, Manager, and Proprietor of the Chotapettah Club, and beamed upon that gentleman, a look of deepest affection illuminating his beautiful old face, "I want to borrow a pair of your shoes for the Professor, poor old gentleman. He's after *amœbæ*, whatever they may be, bareheaded, barefooted, and clad in the roomiest and bed-roomiest of garbs.... No, my dear boy, don't get up; I'll take a pair from your room if I may.... Thanks so much.... It wouldn't 'pauperize' the old man either, if we didn't return them to you, for he'd never know, and I fear he has practically no clothes at all.... I don't think he'd remark the fact if he found a sack of sovereigns on his table — nor if they disappeared again... Thank you so much," and Father Gregory faded quietly away.

He did everything quietly, unobtrusively, gently, perfectly; for all his movements were in keeping with his sweet and beautiful presence....

"When I see Father Gregory or think of him," said Derek Mantin, the Man of Seasons, Poet, Artist, and Universal Lover, "I think of good women, of the high-bred French Abbés of old time; I think of the days of rapiers, velvet, lace, and dignity; I think of miniatures, of silver bowls of fine roses, of Watteau pictures, of Dresden china, of gems and intaglios; I think of angels — for he *is* an angel — an angel with silvery hair, blue eyes, perfect complexion, tender, strong mouth, and delicate tiny hands and feet — and I gratefully thank God...."

As Father Gregory softly closed the door, John Durham sat gazing at it, in reverie, awhile, and then murmured:

"What would the Club be without you, Father — noblest and kindliest and gentlest of men.... It is as though we had a Saint — or a woman — in the place...."

"There's a sorter pusson wants to see yer, Sir," said Serjeant Bunn, Hall Porter, Steward, and Chief of Staff, knocking, entering, and breaking in upon his admired master's reverie....

"Bunn! How many times have I told you that only a fool and a cad judges by clothes and outward signs of position? The gentlemen who come here may—"

"Oh no, Sir, 'e ain't no gennleman— 'e's a Clarence!... That's all-right, Sir. I knows a gennleman all-right, Sir — now.... 'E never wasn't a gennleman nor never won't be, 'e will, Sir.... 'E never toke off 'is 'at when I osk 'im inside, an' when I gove 'im a cheer 'e sot on the edge of it uncumferble-like — where a gennleman born an' bred an' buttered would 'ave sot in a sorter you-be-damned-my-lad attitooed.... Bit of a Dago or a furriner I should say, Sir, sorter impident and trucklin', sorcy and whinin' both to once, like all them furriners. Uses scent 'e do, Sir. Makes the air niff with it. A mos' niffairious pusson."

Serjeant Bunn was a Character and an Institution, a beloved and privileged servant whose past-participles were much appreciated and sought after. He was also an ex-convict and unhanged murderer of great trustworthiness and reliability.

"Ask him to come in here, Bunn," replied John Durham.

"Better ast 'im to wander, Sir. I knows the sort," advised the Serjeant.

"Bunn!"

"Werry good, Sir."

The worthy warrior saluted, wheeled right about "in three distinct motions," marched to the door, left-wheeled with extreme precision and exactitude, as of one who, though unjustly rebuked and rejected, will do his duty firmly and faithfully to the last, and proceeded in "quick time, head erect, and stepping short, thumb in line with the seam of the trousers" adown the great verandah to where, at the entrance, he had left the "pusson," a rather shabbily smart, shifty-eyed Eurasian who seemed to find it impossible to be still. When not changing his feet he was moving his hands restlessly and plucking at his clothes, or fingering his sparse ill-trimmed moustache, while his head was as constantly on the move as that of an elephant.

"If 'e 'ad a tail 'e'd flap it like an 'oss in the fly-season," observed Serjeant Bunn distinctly to the circumambient air, as he halted before the visitor.

"What's thatt, mann?" inquired the latter sharply.

"I said as 'ow Mr. Durham'll see you in the orderly-room, me lord," was the untruthful reply.

The other glanced at him sharply, found his face vacant and innocent, rose from the edge of his chair, accepted the title as a tribute to his smart appearance, and replied, "Of course he will, my mann—"

"Wot name, me lord?" inquired Serjeant Bunn at the door of the office. "I on'y remembers the Clarence Marmalade part."

"Say Clarence Marmaduke Mortimer Montmorencee, Esquire," was the reply.

"I couldn't, me lord," answered Serjeant Bunn, "I'm on'y a middle-weight," and, opening the door upon a sharp double tap, he announced loudly and with wooden face, as he stood aside, in best butler manner:

"Mister Clarence Smarm-a-Dook Montimortamoreamercy, Esquire," and departed thence — apparently.

The door had a large keyhole and Serjeant Bunn a large sense of his duty to his master — about, he feared, to be fleeced.

Mr. Montmorency entered with alacrity, smoothing his smooth hair, straightening his satin bow, and arranging his features in a pleasing and ingratiating smile.

"Good morning, Sir," said he, with a duck of the head, a flourish of a rather dingy hand, and a quick glance round the room.

"Good morning. Won't you sit down," replied John Durham, indicating a comfortable leathern arm-chair that faced the strong light of the window.

"Oh no, Sir, thank you, Sir," replied the visitor, twirling his bowler hat and shuffling remorselessly.

"What can I do for you, then?" inquired the proprietor of the Chotapettah Club.

"Well, Sir, it's like this, Sir," spake Mr. Clarence Mortimer, surnamed Montmorency, with a pleasing mixture of *chee-chee* and Cockney accents, "I have heard that thiss iss a Club in which *pukka* gentlemenn who have seen sorrow and misfortune can get Chymbers at a very cheap ryte, and that the messing-rytes are even cheaper.... In fact I am told that they can live here free, while a bit under the weather. Now I am not ashymed to styte to a kind-hearted gent, like yourself thatt it's my unhappee fyte to be there myself — in point of fact I'm afryde I'm clean broke and— "

"I understand," replied Durham, "but there is no vacancy upon my staff at present."

"Pardon me, Mr. Durham, Sir, but you don't understand at all, it seems," corrected Mr. Montmorency in an injured voice. "You myke a mistyke and a very grievous error altogether, Sir.... I am a gentlemann of birth and education. A thorough gentlemann, Sir, lett me tell you plainlee.... I was at Eton and at Oxford College and I was an Armee-officer until misfortunes overtook me.... I am a perfect gentlemann reduced by bad luck — a gentlemann in distress, although I once knew what it is to ride in a carriage and pair and to have champyne everee day of my life."

"I was at Oxford myself," observed John Durham, "and in those days there were many colleges at Oxford.... Perhaps you meant University College when you said Oxford College?"

"Why, of course, Sir, what else?" replied Clarence, "Oxford University College it was."

"Ah — and which was your Regiment?"

"Do you doubt a gentlemann's word, Sir?" inquired Clarence with pained surprise. He had evidently expected worthier treatment.

"There is not a shadow of *doubt* in my mind, Mr. — er — Montmorency, shall we say — for the present."

Mr. Montmorency-for-the-present looked exceeding discomfortable.

"*Qui hai!*" called Durham, and the door was opened with suspicious alacrity by Serjeant Bunn instead of the *chuprassie* who sat at the receipt of orders, without the office.

"Bring me the Army Lis—" and lo! it was already in the perspicacious Serjeant's hand.

"Knew you'd want it, Sir, directly I seen Mr. Clarence Mar-me-entry," he remarked, with an air of innocent intelligence.

"Remarkable foresight! And did you know which issue I should want also?" inquired his master.

"All one to 'im, Sir," was the unabashed reply, as the wily warrior retired.

"In what year did you leave the army and the regiment you have not yet named?" asked Durham, turning again to his visitor, whose restlessness had become a kind of St. Vitus's dance.

"Look here, Mr. Durham, Sir," protested that worthy, "I didn't come here to be insulted; I caime for help. I'm an English gentlemann *pukka*, I amm—"

"From the Presidency Police Court?" asked Durham.

"Police Court?... Who's talking about Police Courts? If you don't know an English gentlemann from a wrong 'un you're no gentlemann yourself! What ever myde you think I ever been near a Police Court?"

"Well! not to waste your time further, Mr. Sharkey Spottle, I have been rather expecting a visit from you ever since my friend the Presidency Police Court Missionary wrote me that a gentleman answering, sometimes, to the name of Spottle, had been making kind inquiries about this Club.... Take my advice and go and work honestly.... Good morning. *Qui hai!*" and Serjeant Bunn again entered on the call, instead of the *chuprassie*, dispatched elsewhere.

No word spake the Serjeant to Mr. Spottle, son of a London book-maker and a Eurasian stewardess, but he made a gesture. He made it with a large and stiffly protruding thumb, swiftly, and with a jerk — in the direction of the door.

Outside he murmured, "*Chello*, Antonio."

At the porch, Mr. Spottle, plucking up dignity and hauteur, turned upon his offensively watchful attendant and said:

"Mann! call my *ghari*."

Did Serjeant Bunn take umbrage and decline?

He did not.

Leaning round a pillar, he deeply inflated his capacious chest, and, in a valuable parade voice, made the welkin ring with:

"Wottoh! without there! Bring up Black Merier for her ole patron," and departed humming a *little* ditty anent Antonio, Sapolio, and Chokey-O....

Returning to the office, ostensibly to flick the chair on which Mr. Spottle had not sat, and to return it to the position it had not occupied before his advent, the Serjeant coughed modestly and deprecatingly, ere remarking:

"I'm werry glad you wasn't what I might call a fool, Sir, if I may be allown to make so bold—"

"I am sorry you *are* one, Bunn, if I may be 'allown' to make so bold," replied Durham. "I shouldn't have given the rascal a farthing even if Mr. Hart hadn't written to warn me that a Eurasian sharper named 'Sharkey' Spottle had asked him about the Chotapettah Club, and was likely to try and swindle me when he had finished his 'time.'... He describes him as the meanest rogue he has ever encountered.... Poor wretch.... But he's not a Failure, Bunn, he's a great Success I understand — as a swindler. I fear this is not the right type of hospital for him, in any case."

"Well, 'e ain't on 'is uppers yet, Sir, neether. 'E rolled up in a *tikka-ghari* as large as life, and 'e went away in it cursin' amazin' flooent — in spite of me a-callin' it up

for 'im most perlite. I'd like to 'ave Clarence as a rookie in my old corps for a month," and the mouth of Serjeant Bunn appeared to water....

John Durham worked on for an hour, writing letters, signing receipts, initialling bills, casting accounts, and generally carrying on the accountant and secretarial work of the Club.

Anon he laid down his pen, leant back in his chair, and sat musing....

Should he give Luson notice to leave the Club at his earliest convenience, or should he give the fellow another chance, and permit him to choose between the Club and his disgusting income? Surely there was no more tainted and abominable money in the wide world than that earned by deliberately "suggestive" writing and drawing.

Fancy a man with the talent to write powerfully and draw beautifully, using that talent and education in pandering to the most vicious of vices and filthy of filthinesses — in making money out of man's most terrible temptation and greatest weakness.

One could be almost reconciled to the ancient and horrible superstition of a material hell, a brimstone lake, outer darkness, and the "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth," when one thought of such an awful, deliberate, and persistent sin.

Was there filthier lucre in the world?

Luson must go. Luson was no brave, well-meaning, well-beaten Failure.... No weakling with an inherited vice too strong for him; no victim of ill-luck or ill-health. No lovable ne'er-do-well was Luson. Let him carry on his foul trade elsewhere, if he must....

A gentle knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Father Gregory.

"Ah, my dear Father," cried Durham, "you come when needed, as always," and the strong, sad face lit up with pleasure and love. "Come and sit down awhile — you never rest.... I have just had a visitor, and his coming has made me think of yours once again."

"Oh? Some one like me?" smiled the old priest.

"No, Father. It was a case of association by contrast, and reminded me of that bright day in my life and the Club's history, when you arrived— 'from Nowhere' as you insisted.... 'There's a gentleman to see you, Sir,' announced old Bunn. 'No name, but he's a *pukka* Sahib and a kinder sorter Pardre in one o' them black night-shirts,' and when you entered I knew you at once."

"Knew me, my son? Knew me?" interrupted Father Gregory, half-rising from his chair — while a look of intense surprise spread over his delicate features.

"Why, yes, Father dear.... I felt absolutely certain that we had met before, that I knew you perfectly — and the struggle to remember and to call you by name was almost painful. For one second Memory seemed to leap up like a flame and light me to the clue I wanted, and then, as I rose to my feet, stretched out my hand, and had the words on the tip of my tongue — to claim you — the flame died down and my mind was dark and empty again. But I *knew* that I really knew you, although I didn't know you, if you understand—"

"I understand perfectly, my son," murmured the old man as his face resumed its natural and normal placid calm and sweetness, the face of one who has passed through the fire purified and refined, and found suffering a blessing.

"Yes," continued Durham, "and for months after you had come, every time I saw your face or thought of it, I was conscious of an unconscious groping for something lost — of a Memory *of* a departed Memory.... Even to this day and hour, Father, I feel that there is some bond between us, or that we have 'met in a former life,' as poor Derek Mantin would have it."

"It is simply because we love and understand each other, my son," replied Father Gregory, and his smile was an emanation of the Love that he loved, and of the kindliness and sweetness that informed his whole being.

"Yes, that was the great day of my life, Father," resumed Durham, "and I shall never forget my first sight of your face and the sound of your voice. '*I have just heard of you and your work*, *John Durham*' you said, '*and I have come to put my poor services and purse at your disposal*, *if you will let me join you. I am a great Failure and Sinner — so I am well qualified for election....*'"

"Yes, my son," rejoined Father Gregory, "and you replied, 'Come to-day, Sir, though I know well you are no Sinner and only in the World's poor blinded eyes, a Failure. You and I are old friends — in two minutes...'" and both men sat smiling at pleasant reminiscence....

"And now I want your advice once more, Father," said Durham at length. "About Luson.... A parcel for him was put by accident among my post this morning and, without looking at the cover, I opened it... and found galley-proofs and illustrations of vile and beastly stories. He is a fine French scholar as well as an artist, you know. He came to me a broken, ruined, and drunken journalist — picked out of the gutter by one of my honorary 'agents' in Bombay. Drifted to India from South Africa, where he had been an Imperial Yeomanry trooper. He was on the free list here until I told him I thought he was well enough to use his pen and pencil again, and this is how he uses it...."

"Yes — Luson—" replied Father Gregory. "I have had a most anxious eye on Luson for months. He has not talked to me at all — and it has been forced upon my notice that he is a secret drinker — who never by any chance joins Barronby's — ah— '*binges*,' nor drinks in the bar — and that he receives a considerable number of registered letters... and did so, when on your free list. As you know, I'd never spy on any man for any purpose, but there are things about Luson one can't help knowing — and deploring. I don't want to be unkind or censorious, but there's a smug sleekness and sly prosperity about Luson that's very foreign to our Failures' Club...."

"Yes. I say he's no Failure, Father, and had better go and carry on his abominable business elsewhere, if he is too low an animal to realize his own filthiness...."

"We've never yet lost a man unsatisfactorily like that, my son — and we won't now if we can help it.... Don't expel him.... Expulsion from school is a confession of failure on the part of the school — and *we* are a school you know, John.... A school for the dunces and weaklings and naughty boys...."

"But a school should expel a boy who is a real source of contamination, Father," objected Durham.

"Just so, my son," was the quick answer, "but Luson is not that, here.... I fear we take a lot of contaminating — and his vile stuff does not enter the Club, of course, published.... No, he merely soaks himself, in secret, without leading others to drink — and he only contaminates the 'gentle reader' of French gutter-novelettes. Give me three months and then see whether Luson is to be ejected.... We're a home for incurables, John, and, if necessary, we'll have an 'infectious' ward, and put Luson in it, poor chap, rather than discharge him uncured. But that *won't* be necessary, you see if it is..."

End of Sample