ADVENTURES OF BINDLE

HERBERT JENKINS

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WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This Bindle Book deals with the further adventures of Joseph Bindle, furniture remover. One of the criticisms levelled at "The Night Club" was that there was not enough of Bindle in it. In the new volume Bindle is there all the time.

The story is told of how he helped Mr. Hearty to advertise his new shop; how Lady Knob-Kerrick's drawing-room was, without her knowledge, turned into billets for soldiers; how Mrs. Bindle decided to take a lodger and what came of it; how Bindle became a porter at the Fulham Square Mansions and let the same flat to two people, and the complications that ensued; how he discouraged the Rev. Andrew MacFie's attentions to his niece, Millie Hearty.

In this volume reappear practically all those in the previous volume, including the gloomy Ginger, Wilkes, Huggles, Lady Knob-Kerrick, Dick Little, "Guggers," Mr. and Mrs. Hearty, "Millikins," together with a number of new characters.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE BINDLES ON THE ROCKS
BINDLE
THE NIGHT CLUB
JOHN DENE OF TORONTO
MALCOLM SAGE, DETECTIVE
MRS. BINDLE
PATRICIA BRENT, SPINSTER
THE RETURN OF ALFRED
THE RAIN GIRL
THE STIFFSONS
and other stories

ADVENTURES OF BINDLE

by

HERBERT JENKINS

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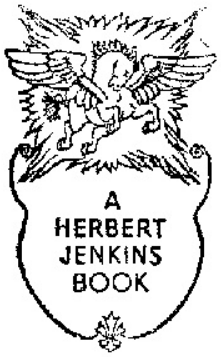

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TO

THE CHILDREN OF THE DEAD END

There are Fairies in the city,
    There are Fairies on the down,
When Wee Hughie comes from Ireland
    To visit London Town.

There is sunshine in the dungeon,
    There is starlight in the grave,
If June will but remember
    The things that April gave.

CONTENTS

All the characters in this book are entirely imaginary and have no relation whatsoever to any living persons.

ADVENTURES OF BINDLE

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE LODGER

Bang! Even Bindle was startled by the emphasis with which Mrs. Bindle placed upon the supper-table a large pie-dish containing a savoury-smelling stew.

"Anythink wrong?" he enquired solicitously, gazing at Mrs. Bindle over the top of the evening paper.

"Wrong!" she cried. "Is there anything right?"

"Well, there's beer, an' Beatty, an' the boys wot's fightin'," began Bindle suggestively.

"Don't talk to me!" Mrs. Bindle banged a plate of stew in front of Bindle, to which he applied himself earnestly.

For some minutes the only sound was that occasioned by Bindle's enjoyment of his supper, as he proceeded to read the newspaper propped up in front of him.

"You're nice company, aren't you?" cried Mrs. Bindle, making a dive with the spoon at a potato, which she transferred to her plate. "I might be on a desert island for all the company you are."

Bindle gazed at Mrs. Bindle over the small bone from which he was detaching the last vestiges of nutriment by means of his teeth. He replaced the bone on the edge of his plate in silence.

"You think of nothing but your stomach," Mrs. Bindle continued angrily. "Look at you now!"

"Well, now, ain't you funny!" remarked Bindle, as he replaced his glass upon the table. "If I'm chatty, you say, "Old your tongue!' If I ain't chatty, you ask why I ain't a-makin' love to you."

After a moment's silence he continued meditatively: "I kept rabbits, silkworms, an' a special kind o' performin' flea, an' I seemed to get to understand 'em all; but women—well, you may search me!" and he pushed his plate from him as a sign

of repletion.

Mrs. Bindle rose from the table. Bindle watched her curiously; it was never wise to enquire what course was to follow.

"I answered an advertisement to-day," she announced, as she banged an apple-pie on the table.

With difficulty Bindle withdrew his interest from the pie to Mrs. Bindle's statement.

"You don't say so," he remarked pleasantly.

"And about time, I should think, with food going up as it is," she continued, as she hacked out a large V-shaped piece of pie-crust which she transferred to a plate, and proceeded to dab apple beside it.

Bindle regarded her uncomprehendingly.

"In *The Gospel Sentinel*." She vouchsafed the information grudgingly and, rising, she fetched a paper from the dresser and threw it down in front of Bindle, indicating a particular part of the page with a vicious stab of her fore-finger.

Bindle picked up the paper. The spot indicated was the column headed "Wanted." He read:

> "CHRISTIAN HOME wanted by a single gentleman, chapel-goer, temperance, quiet, musical, home-comforts, good-cooking, moderate terms. References given and required. Apply Lonely, c/o *The Gospel Sentinel*."

Bindle looked up from the paper at Mrs. Bindle.

"Well?" she challenged.

He turned once more to the paper and re-read the advertisement with great deliberation, forgetful of his fast-cooling plate.

"Well," remarked Bindle judicially, "this is a Christian 'ome right enough, plenty of soap an' water, with an 'ymn or two thrown in so as you won't notice the smell. Cookin's good likewise, an' as for 'ome-comforts, if we ain't got 'em, who 'as? There's sweepin' an' scrubbin' an' mats everywhere, mustn't smoke in the parlour unless you 'appen to be the chimney, and of course there's you, the

biggest 'ome-comfort of all. Yes! Mrs. B.," he concluded, shaking his head with gloomy conviction, "we got enough 'ome comforts to start a colony, I'm always trippin' over 'em."

"Eat your pie," snapped Mrs. Bindle, "perhaps it'll stop your mouth."

Bindle applied himself to the apple-pie with obvious relish, glancing from time to time at *The Gospel Sentinel*.

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Bindle once more.

"I was jest wonderin'," said Bindle.

"What about?"

"I was jest wonderin'," continued Bindle, "why we want a lodger, us like two love-birds a-singin' an' a-cooin' all day long."

"What about the housekeeping?" demanded Mrs. Bindle aggressively.

"The 'ousekeepin'?" enquired Bindle innocently.

"Yes, the housekeeping," repeated Mrs. Bindle with rising wrath, as if Bindle were directly responsible, "the housekeeping, I said, and food going up like—like——"

"'Ell," suggested Bindle helpfully.

"How am I to make both ends meet?" she demanded.

"I suppose they must meet?" he enquired tentatively.

"Don't be a fool, Bindle!" was the response.

"I ain't goin' to be a fool with that there lodger 'angin' about," retorted Bindle. "If 'e starts a-playin' about wi' my 'Ome Comfort, 'e'll find 'is jaw closed for alterations. I'm a desperate feller where my 'eart's concerned. There was poor 'ole 'Orace only the other day. Jest back from the front 'e was."

Bindle paused and shook his head mournfully.

"Horace who?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"'Orace Gaze," replied Bindle. "Nice cove too, 'e is.

'"Ullo! 'Orace,' I calls out, when I see 'im jest a-comin' from the station with all 'is kit.

"'Cheerio,' says 'e.

"'The missis'll be glad to see you,' I says.

"'She don't know I'm 'ere yet,' 'e says.

"'Didn't you send 'er a telegram?' I asks.

"'Telegram!' says 'e, 'not 'arf.'

"'Why not?'

"'Lord! ain't you a mug, Joe!' says 'e; 'you don't catch me a-trustin' women, I got my own way, I 'ave,' says 'e, mysterious like.

"'What is it?' I asks 'im.

"'Well, I goes 'ome,' says 'e, "er thinkin' me at the front, rattles my key in the front door, then I nips round to the back, an' catches the blighter every time!'"

"I won't listen to your disgusting stories," said Mrs. Bindle angrily.

"Disgustin'?" said Bindle incredulously.

"You've a lewd mind, Bindle."

"Well, well!" remarked Bindle, "it's somethink to 'ave a mind at all, it's about the only thing they don't tax as war profits."

"You'll have to be careful when the lodger comes." There was a note of grim warning in Mrs. Bindle's voice.

"Lodgers ain't to be trusted," said Bindle oracularly. "If you expects 'em to pinch your money-box, orf they goes with your missis; an' if you're 'opin' it'll be your missis, blowed if they don't pouch the canary. No!" he concluded with conviction, "lodgers ain't to be depended on."

"That's right, go on; but you're not hurting me," snapped Mrs. Bindle, rising to clear away. "You always oppose me, perhaps you'll tell me how I'm to feed you on your wages." She stood, her hands on her hips, looking down upon Bindle with challenge in her eye.

"My wages! why, I'm gettin'——"

"Never mind what you're getting," interrupted Mrs. Bindle. "You eat all you get and more, and you know it. Look at the price of food, and me waiting in queues half the day to get it for you. You're not worth it," she concluded with conviction.

"I ain't, Mrs. B.," replied Bindle good-humouredly, "I ain't worth 'alf the love wot women 'ave 'ad for me."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed. "You always was fond of your food," she continued, as if reluctant to let slip a topic so incontrovertible.

"I was, Mrs. B.," agreed Bindle; "an' wot is more I probably always shall be as long as you go on cookin' it. Wot I shall do when you go orf with the lodger, I don't know," and Bindle wagged his head from side to side in utter despondency.

Mrs. Bindle made an unprovoked attack upon the kitchen fire.

"Well," said Bindle after a pause, "if it's rations or a lodger, I suppose it's got to be a lodger," and he drew a deep sigh of resignation. He turned once more to *The Gospel Sentinel*. "Musical, too, ain't 'e," he continued. "I wonder wot 'e plays, the jews' 'arp or a drum? Seems a rare sport 'e does, chapel-goer, temperance, quiet, musical, fond of 'ome-comforts, good cookin'; an' don't want to pay much; regular blood I should call 'im."

"He's coming to-night to see the place," Mrs. Bindle announced, "and don't you go and make me feel ashamed. You'd better keep out of the room."

"'Ow could you!" cried Bindle reproachfully, as he proceeded to light his pipe. "Me——"

"Don't do that!" snapped Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle regarded her over the flaming match with eyebrows raised interrogatingly.

"Perhaps he doesn't smoke," she explained.

"But I ain't goin' to give up tobacco," said Bindle with decision. "'Oly Angels! me with a wife an a lodger an' no pipe!"

He looked about him as if in search of sympathy. Then turning to Mrs. Bindle,

he demanded:

"You mean to say I got to give up smokin' for a lodger!" Indignation had smoothed out the wrinkles round his eyes and stilled the twitchings at the corners of his mouth.

"It doesn't matter after he's here," Mrs. Bindle responded sagely.

Slowly the set-expression vanished from Bindle's face; the wrinkles and twitches returned, and he breathed a sigh of elaborate relief.

"Mrs. B.," he said admiringly, "you 'aven't lived for nineteen years with your awful wedded 'usband, lovin', 'onourin' an' obeyin' 'im—I don't think—without learnin' a thing or two." He winked knowingly.

"Yes," he continued, apparently addressing a fly upon the ceiling, "we'll catch our lodger first an' smoke 'im afterwards, all of which is good business. Funny 'ow religion never seems to make you too simple to——"

Bindle was interrupted by a knocking at the outer-door. Mrs. Bindle performed a series of movements with amazing celerity. She removed and folded her kitchen-apron, placing it swiftly in the dresser-drawer, gave a hasty glance in the looking-glass over the mantelpiece to assure herself that all was well with her personal appearance and, finally, slipped into the parlour to light the gas. She was out again in a second and, as she passed into the passage leading to the outer-door, she threw back at Bindle the one word "Remember," pregnant with as much meaning as that uttered two and a half centuries before in Whitehall.

"Nippy on 'er feet is Mrs. B.," muttered Bindle admiringly, as he listened intently to the murmur of voices and the sound of footsteps in the passage. Presently the parlour-door closed and then—silence.

Bindle fidgeted about the kitchen. He was curious as to what was taking place in the parlour and, above all, what manner of man the prospective lodger would turn out to be. He picked up the evening paper, endeavouring to read what the Austrian Prime Minister thought of the prospects of peace, what Berlin thought of the Austrian Prime Minister, what the Kaiser thought of the Almighty, and what the Almighty was permitted to think of the Kaiser. But international politics and the War had lost their interest. Bindle was conscious that he was on the eve of a crisis in his home life.

"'Ow the injiarubber ostridge can a cove read when 'e ain't smokin'?" he muttered

discontentedly as he paused to listen. He had detected a movement in the parlour.

Yes; the door had been opened. There was again the murmur of voices, steps along the passage and, finally, the sound of the outer-door closing. A moment later Mrs. Bindle entered.

Bindle looked up expectantly; but remembering that curiosity was the last thing calculated to open Mrs. Bindle's set lips, he became engrossed in his paper.

Mrs. Bindle seated herself opposite to him and, smoothing her skirt, "folded 'er 'ands on 'er supper," as Bindle had once expressed it.

"He's coming Monday," she proclaimed with the air of one announcing an event of grave national importance.

"Does 'e smoke?" enquired Bindle anxiously.

"He does not," replied Mrs. Bindle with undisguised satisfaction; "but," she added, as if claiming for some hero the virtue of self-abnegation, "he doesn't object to it—in moderation," she added significantly.

"Well, that's somethink," admitted Bindle as he proceeded to light his long-neglected pipe. "There was pore 'ole Alf Gorley wot beer made sick; but 'e used to like to see other coves with a skinful."

"Don't be disgusting, Bindle," snapped Mrs. Bindle, piqued that his apparent lack of interest in the lodger gave her no opportunity of imparting the information she was bursting to divulge.

"Wot's disgustin'?" demanded Bindle.

"Him, watching men making beasts of themselves," retorted Mrs. Bindle.

"Them makin' beasts o' themselves!" Bindle exclaimed. "If you'd ever seen Alf after 'alf a pint o' beer, you wouldn't 'ave said it was them wot was makin' beasts o'——"

"Mr. Hearty will like him," interrupted Mrs. Bindle, unable longer to keep off the subject of the lodger. Mr. Hearty had married Mrs. Bindle's sister, and had become a prosperous greengrocer.

"'Earty like Alf! 'Old me, 'Orace!" cried Bindle.

"I meant Mr. Gupperduck," said Mrs. Bindle with dignity.

"Mr. Wot-a-duck!" Bindle cried, his interest too evident for concealment.

"Mr. Josiah Gupperduck," repeated Mrs. Bindle with unction. "That is his name."

Bindle whistled, a long low sound of joy and wonder. "Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed.

"Don't you swear before me, Joseph Bindle," cried Mrs. Bindle angrily; "for I won't stand it."

"Gupperduck!" repeated Bindle with obvious enjoyment. "Sounds like a patent mackintosh."

"Oh! you may laugh," said Mrs. Bindle, drawing her lips, "you may laugh; but he'll be company for me. He plays too." She could no longer restrain her desire to tell all she knew about Mr. Gupperduck.

"Is it the jew's 'arp, or the drum wot 'e plays?" enquired Bindle presently.

"It's neither," replied Mrs. Bindle, "it's the accordion."

Bindle groaned. Mentally he visualised Mr. Hearty's hymn-singing Sunday evenings, plus Mr. Gupperduck and his accordion.

"Well, well!" he remarked philosophically, "I suppose we're none of us perfect."

"He's a very good man, an' he's goin' to join our chapel," announced Mrs. Bindle with satisfaction.

Bindle groaned again. "'Earty, an' Mrs. B., an' Ole Buttercup," he muttered. "Joe Bindle, you'll be on the saved-bench before you know where you are"; and rising he went out, much to the disappointment of Mrs. Bindle, who was prepared to talk "lodger" until bed-time.

To Bindle the lodger was something between a convention and an institution. He was a being around whom a vast tradition had accumulated. In conjunction with the mother-in-law he was, "on the halls," the source from which all humour flowed. His red nose, umbrella and bloater were ageless.

He was a sower of discord in other men's houses, waxing fat on the produce of a stranger's labour. He would as cheerfully go off with his landlord's wife for ever,

as with the unfortunate man's shirt or trousers for a few hours, thus losing him a day's work.

Nemesis seemed powerless to dog the footsteps of the lodger, retribution was incapable of tracking him down. He was voracious of appetite, prolific of explanation, eternally on the brink of affluence, for ever in the slough of debt.

He was a prince of parasites, a master of optimism, a model of obtuseness, he could achieve more, and at less cost to himself, than a Gypsy. He was as ancient as the hills, as genial as the sunshine, as cheerful as an expectant relative at the death-bedside of wealth. He was unthinkable, unforgettable, unejectable, living on all men for all time.

Nations rose and declined, kings came and went, emperors soared and fell; but the lodger stayed on.

Bindle looked forward to the coming of Mr. Gupperduck with keen interest. Since the evening of his call, Mrs. Bindle had become uncommunicative.

"Wot's 'e do?" Bindle had enquired.

"He's engaged upon the Lord's work," she had replied, and proved unamenable to all further interrogation.

On the Monday Bindle was home from work early, only to be informed that Mr. Gupperduck would not arrive until eight o'clock.

"Now you just be careful what you say, Bindle," Mrs. Bindle had admonished him as she busied herself with innumerable saucepans upon the stove.

"Don't you be nervous, Mrs. B.," he reassured her, sniffing the savoury air with keen anticipation, "there ain't nothink wrong with my conversation once I gets goin'. Wot about drink?" he demanded as he unhooked from the dresser the blue and white jug with the crimson butterfly just beneath the spout.

"He's temperance," replied Mrs. Bindle with unction.

"Well, I 'ope 'e looks it," was Bindle's comment as he went out.

When time permitted, Bindle's method of fetching the supper-beer was what he described as "'alf inside and 'alf in the jug," which meant that he spent half an hour in pleasant converse with congenial spirits at The Yellow Ostrich.

When he returned to Fenton Street, Mr. Gupperduck had arrived. Depositing the jug upon the table with deliberation, Bindle turned to welcome the guest.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Gutter——" He paused, the name had momentarily escaped him.

"Gupperduck, Mr. Josiah Gupperduck," volunteered the lodger.

"It ain't easy, is it?" said Bindle cheerfully. "Must 'ave caused you a rare lot o' trouble, a name like that."

Mr. Gupperduck eyed him disapprovingly. He was a small, thin man, with a humourless cast of face, large round spectacles, three distinct wisps of overworked hair that failed to conceal his baldness, a short brown beard that seemed to stand out straight from his chin, and a red nose. His upper lip was bare, save for a three days' growth of bristles.

"Looks like a owl wot's been on the drink," was Bindle's mental comment. "You can read 'is 'ole 'istory in the end of 'is nose."

"Been a pleasant day," remarked Bindle conversationally, quite forgetful that it had rained continuously since early morning.

"Pleasant!" interrogated Mr. Gupperduck.

Bindle suddenly remembered. "For the ducks, I mean," he said; then with inspiration added, "not for Gupperducks."

"Bindle!" admonished Mrs. Bindle. "You forget yourself."

"Oh, don't mind me, Mr. G.," said Bindle; "there ain't no real 'arm in me."

Bindle proceeded to put "an 'ead on the beer." This he did by pouring it into the glass from a distance of fully a yard and with astonishing accuracy. Catching Mr. Gupperduck's eye, he winked.

"Can't get an 'ead like that on lemonade," he remarked cheerfully.

The atmosphere was constrained. Mr. Gupperduck was tired and hungry, Bindle was hungry without being tired, and Mrs. Bindle was grimly prepared for the worst.

"Well, 'ere's long legs to the baby!" cried Bindle, raising his glass and drinking thirstily.

Mrs. Bindle cast a swift glance at Mr. Gupperduck, who gazed at Bindle wonderingly over the top of the spoon he was raising to his mouth.

The meal continued in silence. Bindle was hypnotised by Mr. Gupperduck's ears. They stood out from each side of his head like sign-boards, as if determined that nothing should escape them.

After a time Mr. Gupperduck began to show signs that the first ardour of his appetite had been appeased.

"If it ain't a rude question, mister," began Bindle, "might I ask wot's your job?"

"I'm in the service of the Lord," replied Mr. Gupperduck in a harsh tone.

"Trade union wages?" queried Bindle with assumed innocence.

"Bindle!" admonished Mrs. Bindle, "behave yourself."

"I am a sower of the seed," said Mr. Gupperduck pompously and with evident self-satisfaction.

"Well, personally myself," said Bindle, "I ain't much belief in them allotments. You spend all your time in diggin', gettin' yourself in an 'ell of a mess, an' then somebody comes along an' pinches your bloomin' vegetables."

"I refer to the spiritual seed," said Mr. Gupperduck. "I preach the word of God, the peace that passeth all understanding."

Bindle groaned inwardly, and silence fell once more over the board.

"Mrs. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck at length, "you have given me a most excellent supper."

Mrs. Bindle's lips became slightly visible.

"The Lord shall feed his flock," remarked Mr. Gupperduck apropos of nothing in particular, "and——"

"'E keeps a few little pickin's for 'Is Gupperducks," flashed Bindle.

"Bindle!" Mrs. Bindle glanced across at Mr. Gupperduck. The two then entered into a conversation upon the ways of the Lord, about which they both seemed to possess vast stores of the most intimate information. From their conversation

Bindle gathered that Mr. Gupperduck was a lecturer in the parks, mission-halls and the like, being connected with the Society for the Suppression of Atheism.

"And what are the tenets of your spiritual faith, Mr. Bindle?" Mr. Gupperduck suddenly turned and addressed himself to Bindle.

"Wot's my wot?" enquired Bindle with corrugated forehead.

"He's a blasphemer, Mr. Gupperduck, I'm sorry to say," volunteered Mrs. Bindle.

Mr. Gupperduck regarded Bindle as if Mrs. Bindle had said he was the "Missing Link."

"Mr. Bindle," he said earnestly, "have you ever thought of the other world?"

"Thought of the other world!" Bindle exclaimed. "If you lived with Mrs. B., you wouldn't 'ave much time for thinkin' of anythink else. She's as dotty about 'eaven as an 'en over a 'shop-egg,' an' as for 'Earty, that's my brother-in-law, well, 'Earty gets my goat when 'e starts about 'eaven an' angels."

"I fear you speak lightly of serious things, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck harshly. "Think of when the trumpet shall sound incorruptible and——!"

"Think o' when the all-clear bugle sounds in Fulham," responded Bindle.

Mr. Gupperduck looked at Mrs. Bindle in horror.

"I'm a special, you know," explained Bindle. "I got to be on the listen for that bugle after the air-raids. My! don't they jest nip back into their little beds again, feelin' 'ow brave they've all been."

Mr. Gupperduck seemed to come to the conclusion that Bindle was hopeless. For the next half-hour he devoted himself to conversing with Mrs. Bindle about "the message" he was engaged in delivering.

"You plays, don't you?" enquired Bindle, as Mr. Gupperduck rose.

"I am very fond of my accordion," replied Mr. Gupperduck.

"I suppose you couldn't give us a tune?" ventured Bindle.

"Not to-night, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck. "I have a lot to do to-morrow." Then, as if suddenly remembering his pose, he added, "There is the Lord's work to be done on the morrow, and His servant hath need of rest."

Bindle stared. Mrs. Bindle regarded her lodger with admiration tinctured with awe. When Mr. Gupperduck could not call to mind an appropriate passage from the Scriptures, he invented one.

"I'm sorry," remarked Bindle, as Mr. Gupperduck moved towards the door. "I wanted you to play a thing I picked up at The Granville the other night. It was a rare good song, 'If You Squeeze Me Tighter, Jimmie, I Shall Scream.' I can whistle it if——" but Mr. Gupperduck was gone.

Then the storm burst.

"You're a disgrace to any respectable 'ome, Joseph Bindle, that you are," Mrs. Bindle broke out as soon as Mr. Gupperduck's bedroom door was heard to close.

"Me?" enquired Bindle in obvious surprise.

"What must he think of us?" demanded Mrs. Bindle. "You with your lewd and blasphemous talk."

"Wot 'ave I done now?" enquired Bindle in an injured tone.

"Talkin' about babies' legs, and—and—oh! you make me ashamed, you do." Mrs. Bindle proceeded to bang away the supper things.

"Steady on," admonished Bindle, "or you'll 'ave the Duck out o' bed."

"What must 'e think of me with such an 'usband?" Mrs. Bindle's aitches were dropping from her under the stress of her pent-up feelings.

"Well! speakin' for myself," said Bindle, relighting his pipe, which had gone out, "he most likely thinks you're an uncommon lucky woman. You see, Lizzie," Bindle continued evenly, "you're fickle, that's wot's the matter with you."

Mrs. Bindle paused in the act of pouring water over the piled-up dishes in the sink.

"As soon as you sees another cove wot takes your fancy, you sort o' loses your taste for your own 'usband."

Bindle seated himself at the table and spread out the evening paper.

"First it's 'Earty, then it's Gupperduck. Now I ask you, Mrs. B., wot would you think if I was to say we must 'ave a woman lodger? Now I ask you!"

"That's quite different," cried Mrs. Bindle angrily. "Mr. Gupperduck is——"

"A sort o' prayer-'og in trousers, judgin' from 'is talk," interrupted Bindle. "Me an' 'im ain't goin' to fall out, though you did give 'im a extra dose o' gravy; at the same time we ain't goin' to fall in love with each other. If 'e pays 'is rent an' behaves quiet like, then I 'aven't nothink to say, for wot's an 'ome without a lodger; but it's got to be 'ands orf my missis, see!"

"Bindle, you're a dirty-minded beast," retorted Mrs. Bindle, snapping her jaws viciously.

"That may, or may not be," replied Bindle as he walked towards the door on his way to bed; "but if you an' 'im start givin' each other the glad-eye, then I'm 'urt in my private feelin's, an' when I'm 'urt in my private feelin's, I'm 'ot stuff," and he winked gravely at the text on the kitchen wall containing some home truths for the transgressor.

CHAPTER II

A DOWNING STREET SENSATION

"Me ride eight miles on an 'orse!" exclaimed Bindle, looking up at the foreman in surprise. "An' who's a-comin' to 'old me on?"

Bindle stood in the yard of Messrs. Empsom & Daley, cartage contractors, regarding a pair of burly cart-horses, ready-harnessed, with the traces thrown over their backs.

The foreman explained in the idiom adopted by foreman that "orders is orders."

"You can ride on top, run beside, or 'ang on be'ind; but you got to be at Merton at twelve o'clock," he said. "We jest 'ad a telephone message that a van's stranded this side o' Merton, 'orses broken down, an' you an' Tippitt 'ave got to take these 'ere and deliver the goods. Then take the van where you're told, an' bring back them ruddy 'orses 'ere, an' don't you forget it."

Bindle scratched his head through the blue and white cricket cap he habitually wore. Horses had suddenly assumed for him a new significance. With elaborate intentness he examined the particular animal that had been assigned to him.

"Wot part d'you sit on, ole son?" he enquired of Tippitt, a pale, weedy youth, with a thin dark moustache that curled into the corners of his mouth. Tippitt's main characteristic was that he always had a cigarette either stuck to his lip or behind his ear. Sometimes both.

"On 'is tail," replied Tippitt laconically, his cigarette wagging up and down as he spoke.

"Sit on 'is wot?" cried Bindle, walking round to the stern of his animal and examining the tail with great attention. "Sit on 'is wot?"

"On 'is tail," repeated Tippitt without manifesting any interest in the conversation. "Right back on 'is 'aunches," he added by way of explanation; "more comfortable."

"Oh!" said Bindle, relieved, "I see. Pity you can't say wot you mean, Tippy, ain't

it? Personally, meself, I'd sooner sit well up, so as I could put me arms round 'is neck. Hi! Spotty!" he called to an unprepossessing stable-hand. "Bring a ladder."

"A wot?" enquired Spotty dully.

"A ladder," explained Bindle. "I got to mount this 'ere Derby winner."

Spotty strolled leisurely across the yard towards Bindle, and for a moment stood regarding the horse in a detached sort of way.

"I'll give you a leg up, mate," he said accommodatingly.

Bindle looked at the horse suspiciously and, seeing there were no indications of vice, at the same time realising that there was nothing else to be done, he acquiesced.

"Steady on, ole sport," he counselled Spotty. "Don't you chuck me clean over the other side."

With a dexterous heave, Spotty landed him well upon the animal's back. Bindle calmly proceeded to throw one leg over, sitting astride.

"Not that way," said Tippitt, "both legs on the near side."

"You can ride your nag wot way you like, Tippy," said Bindle; "but as for me, I likes to 'ave a leg each side. 'Ow the 'ell am I goin' to 'old on if I sit like a bloomin' lady. My Gawd!" he exclaimed, passing his hand along the backbone of the animal, "if I don't 'ave a cushion I shall wear through in two ticks. 'Ere, Spotty, give us a cloth o' some sort, then you can back me as a two-to-one chance."

Tippitt, more accustomed than Bindle to such adventures, vaulted lightly upon his animal, and led the way out of the yard. For some distance they proceeded at an ambling walk, which Bindle found in no way inconvenient. Just as they had entered the Fulham Road, where it branches off from the Brompton Road, an urchin gave Bindle's horse a flick on the flank with a stick, sending it into a ponderous trot, amidst the jangle and clatter of harness. Bindle clutched wildly at the collar.

"'Ere, stop 'im, somebody! 'Old 'im!" he yelled. "I touched the wrong button. Whoa, steady, whoa, ole iron!" he shouted. Then turning his head to one side he called out: "Tippy, Tippy, where the 'ell is the brake? For Gawd's sake stop 'im

before 'e shakes me into a jelly!"

Tippitt's animal jangled up beside that on which Bindle was mounted, and both once more fell back into the ponderous lope at which they had started. With great caution Bindle raised himself into an upright position.

"I wonder wot made 'im do a thing like that," he said reproachfully. "Bruised me all over 'e 'as. I shan't be able to sit down for a month. 'Ere, stop 'im, Tippy. I'm gettin' orf."

Tippitt stretched out his hand and brought both horses to a standstill. Bindle slipped ungracefully over his animal's tail.

"You can 'ave 'im, Tippy, ole sport, I'm goin' to walk," he announced. "When I get tired o' walking, I'll get on a bus. I'll meet you at Wimbledon Common;" and Tippitt, his cigarette hanging loosely from a still looser lower lip, reached over, caught the animal's bridle and, without comment, continued on his way westward.

"Well, live 'an learn," mumbled Bindle to himself. "I don't care wot a jockey gets; but 'e earns it, every penny. Fancy an 'orse bein' as 'ard as that. Catch you up presently, Tippy," he cried. "Mind you don't fall orf," and Bindle turned into The Drag and Hounds "for somethink to take the bruises out," as he expressed it to himself.

"Catch me a-ridin' of an 'orse again without an air-cushion," he muttered as he came out of the public-bar wiping his mouth. He hailed a west-bound bus, and, climbing on the top and lighting his pipe, proceeded to enjoy the morning sunshine.

When Tippitt reached the extreme end of Wimbledon Common, Bindle rose from the grass by the roadside, where he had been leisurely smoking and enjoying the warmth.

"'Ad quite a pleasant little snooze, Tippy," he yawned, as he stretched his arms behind his head. "Wonder who first thought o' ridin' on an 'orse's back," he yawned. "As for me, I'd jest as soon ride on an 'and-saw."

They jogged along in the direction of Merton, Bindle walking beside the horses, Tippitt silent and apathetic, his cigarette still attached to his lower lip.

"You ain't wot I should call a chatty cove, Tippy," remarked Bindle

conversationally; "but then," he added, "that 'as its points. If you don't open your mouth, no woman can't say you ever asked 'er to marry you, can she?"

"Married, mate!" Tippitt vouchsafed the information without expression or interest.

Bindle stood still and looked at him.

Tippitt unconcernedly continued on his way.

"Well, I'm damned!" remarked Bindle, as he continued after the horses. "Well, I'm damned! They'd get you if you was deaf an' dumb an' blind. Pore ole Tippy! no wonder 'e looks like that."

Just outside Merton they came upon a stranded pantechnicon. Drawn up in front of it was a motor-car containing two ladies.

"This the little lot?" enquired Bindle as they pulled up beside the vehicle, which bore the name of John Smith & Company, Merton.

"Are you from Empson & Daleys?" enquired the elder of the two ladies, a sallow-faced, angular woman with pince-nez.

"That's us, mum," responded Bindle.

"I suppose those are the horses," remarked the same lady, indicating the animals with an inclination of her head.

"You ain't got much to learn in the way o' guessing, mum," was Bindle's cheery response.

The lady eyed him disapprovingly. Her companion at the wheel smiled. She was younger. Bindle winked at her; but she froze instantly.

"The horses that were in this van were taken ill," said the lady.

"Wot, both together, mum!" exclaimed Bindle.

"Yes," replied the lady, looking at him sharply.

"Must 'ave been twins or conchies,"[1] was Bindle's explanation of the phenomenon. "If one o' Ginger's twins 'as the measles, sure as eggs the other'll get 'em the next day. That's wot makes Ginger so ratty."

[1] Conscientious objectors to military service.

Bindle walked up to the van and examined it, as if to assure himself that it was in no way defective.

"An' where are we to take it, mum?" he enquired.

"To Mr. Llewellyn John, Number 110, Downing Street," was the reply.

Bindle whistled. "'E ain't movin', is 'e, mum?"

"The van contains a presentation of carved-oak dining-room furniture," she added.

"An' very nice too," was Bindle's comment.

"Outside Downing Street," she continued, "you will be met by a lady who will give you the key that opens the doors of the van."

"'Adn't we better take the key now, mum?" Bindle enquired.

"You'll do as you're told, please," was the uncompromising rejoinder.

"Right-o! mum," remarked Bindle cheerily. "Now then, Tippy, let's get these 'ere 'orses in. Which end d'you begin on?"

Tippitt and Bindle silently busied themselves in harnessing the horses to the pantechnicon.

"Now you won't make any mistake," said the lady when everything was completed. "Number 110, Downing Street, Mr. Llewellyn John."

"There ain't goin' to be no mistakes, mum, you may put your 'and on your 'eart," Bindle assured her.

"Cawfee money, mum?" enquired Tippitt. "It's 'ot." Tippitt never wasted words.

"Tippy, Tippy! I'm surprised at you!" Bindle turned upon his colleague reproachfully. "Only twice 'ave you spoke to-day, an' the second time's to beg. I'm sorry, mum," he said, turning to the lady. "It ain't 'is fault. It's jest 'abit."

The lady hesitated for a moment, then taking her purse from her bag, handed Bindle a two-shilling piece.

Tippitt eyed it greedily.

With a final admonition not to forget, the lady drove off.

Bindle looked at the coin, spat on it, and put it in his pocket.

"Funny thing 'ow a woman'll give a couple o' bob, where a man'll make it 'alf a dollar," he remarked.

"Wot about me?" enquired Tippitt.

"Wot about you, Tippy?" repeated Bindle. "Well, least said soonest mended. You can't 'elp it."

"But I asked 'er," persisted Tippitt.

"Ah! Tippy," remarked Bindle, "it ain't 'im wot asks; but 'im wot gets. 'Owever, you shall 'ave a stone-ginger at the next stoppin' place. Your ole pal ain't goin' back on you, Tippy."

Without a word, Tippitt climbed up into the driver's seat, whilst Bindle clambered on to the tail-board, where he proceeded to fill his pipe with the air of a man for whom time has no meaning.

"Good job they ain't all like me," he muttered. "I likes a day in the country, now *and* then; but always! Not me." He struck a match, lighted his pipe and, with a sigh of contentment, composed himself to bucolic meditation.

One of the advantages of the moving-profession in Bindle's eyes was that it gave him hours of leisured ease, whilst the goods were in transit. "You can slack it like a Cuthbert," he would say. "All you 'as to do is to sit on the tail of a van an' watch the world go by—*some* life that."

Bindle was awakened from his contemplation of the hedges and the white road that ribboned out before his eyes by a man coming out of a gate. At the sight of the pantechnicon he grinned and, with a jerk of his thumb, indicated the van as if it were the greatest joke in the world.

Bindle grinned back, although not quite understanding the cause of the man's amusement.

"'Ot little lot that, mate," remarked the man, stepping off the kerb and walking beside the tailboard.

Bindle looked at him, puzzled at the remark.

"Wot exactly might you be meanin', ole son?" he enquired.

"Oh! come orf of it," said the man. "I won't tell your missis. Like a razzle myself sometimes," and he laughed, obviously amused at this joke.

Bindle slipped off the tail-board and joined the man, who had returned to the pavement.

"You evidently seen a joke wot's caught me on the blind side," he remarked casually.

"A joke," remarked the man; "a whole van-load of jokes, if you was to ask me."

"Well, p'raps you're right," remarked Bindle philosophically, "but if there's as many as all that, I should 'ave thought there'd 'ave been enough for two; but as I say, p'raps you're right. These ain't the times for givin' anythink away, although," he added meditatively, "I 'adn't 'eard of their 'avin' rationed jokes as well as meat and sugar. We shall be 'avin' joke-queues soon," he added. "You seem to be a sort of joke-'og, you do." Bindle turned and regarded his companion with interest.

"You mean to say you don't know wot's inside that there van?" enquired the man incredulously.

"Carved-oak dinin'-room furniture, I been told," replied Bindle indifferently.

The man laughed loudly. Then turned to Bindle. "You mean to say you don't know that van's full o' gals?" he demanded.

"Full o' wot?" exclaimed Bindle, coming to a dead stop. His astonishment was too obvious to leave doubt in the man's mind as to its genuineness.

"Gals an' women," he replied. "Saw 'em gettin' in down the road, out of motors. Dressed in white they was, with coloured sashes over their shoulders. Suffragettes, I should say. They didn't see me though," he added.

Bindle gave vent to a low, prolonged whistle as he resumed his walk.

"'Old me, 'Orace!" he cried happily. "Wot 'ud Mrs. B. say if she knew." Suddenly he paused again, and slapped his knee.

"Well, I'm damned!" he cried. "A raid, of course."

The man looked anxiously up at the blue of the sky.

"It's all right," said Bindle reassuringly. "My mistake; it was a bird."

A few minutes later the man turned off from the main road.

"Hi! Tippy," Bindle hailed, "don't you forget that stone-ginger at the next dairy."

A muttered reply came from Tippitt. Five minutes later he drew up outside a public-house on the outskirts of Wimbledon. Bindle took the opportunity of climbing up on the top of the van, where he gained the information he required. Every inch of the roof was perforated!

"Air-'oles," he muttered with keen satisfaction; "air-'oles, as I'm a miserable sinner," and he clambered down and entered the public-bar, where he convinced Tippitt that his mate could be trusted with money.

When Bindle had drained to the last drop his second pewter, his mind was made up.

"Number 110, Downing Street," he muttered. "White dresses an' coloured sashes. That's it. Well, Joe Bindle, you can't save the bloomin' British Empire from destruction; but you can save the Prime Minister from 'avin' 'is afternoon nap spoilt, leastwise you can try.

"I'm a-goin' for a little stroll, Tippy," he remarked, as he walked towards the door. "Back in ten minutes. If you gets lonely, order another pint an' put it down to me."

"Right-o! mate," replied Tippitt.

Bindle walked along Wimbledon High Street and turned into an oil-shop.

"D'you keep lamp black?" he enquired of the young woman behind the counter.

"Yes," she replied. "How much do you want, we sell it in packets?"

"Let's 'ave a look at a packet," said Bindle.

When he had examined it, he ordered two more.

"Startin' a minstrel troupe," he confided to the young woman.

"But you want burnt cork," she said practically; "lamp black's greasy. You'll

never get it off."

"That's jest why I want it," remarked Bindle with a grin.

The young woman looked at him curiously and, when he had purchased a pea-puffer as well, she decided that he was a harmless lunatic; but took the precaution of testing the half-crown he tendered by ringing it on the counter.

"Shouldn't be surprised if we was to 'ave an 'eavy shower of rain in a few minutes," remarked Bindle loudly a few minutes later, as he rejoined Tippitt, who was engaged in watering the horses.

Tippitt looked at Bindle, his cigarette wagging. Then turning his eyes up to the cloudless sky in surprise, he finally reached the same conclusion as the young woman at the oil-shop.

"Now up you get, Tippy," admonished Bindle, "an' there's another drink for you at The Green Lion." Bindle knew his London.

As the pantechnicon rumbled heavily along by the side of Wimbledon Common, Bindle whistled softly to himself the refrain of "The End of a Happy Day."

Whilst Tippitt was enjoying his fourth pint that morning at The Green Lion, Bindle borrowed a large watering-can, which was handed up to him on the roof of the pantechnicon by a surprised barman. Bindle emptied the contents of one of the packets of lamp-black into the can, and started to stir it vigorously with a piece of twig he had picked up from the side of the Common. When the water had reluctantly absorbed the lamp-black to Bindle's entire satisfaction, he called out loudly:

"I knew we was goin' to 'ave a shower," and he proceeded to water the top of the pantechnicon. "Now I must put this 'ere tarpaulin over, or else the water'll get through them 'oles," he said.

He clearly heard suppressed exclamations as the water penetrated inside the van. Having emptied the can, he proceeded to drag the tarpaulin over the roof, leaving uncovered only a small portion in the centre.

The barman of The Green Lion had been watching Bindle with open-mouthed astonishment.

"What the 'ell are you up to, mate?" he whispered.

Bindle put his forefinger of the right hand to the side of his nose and winked mysteriously. Then going inside The Green Lion he, in a way that did not outrage the regulations that there should be no "treating," had Tippitt's tankard refilled, and called for another for himself.

"If you watch the papers," Bindle remarked to the barman, "I shouldn't be surprised if you was to see wot I was a-doin' on the top of that there van," and again he winked.

The barman looked from Bindle to Tippitt, then touching his forehead with a fugitive first finger, and glancing in the direction of Bindle, made it clear that another was prepared to support the diagnosis of the young woman at the oil-shop.

Bindle completed the journey on the top of the van, industriously occupied in puffing lamp-black through the holes in the roof. His method was to dip the end of the pea-puffer into the packet, then insert it in one of the holes and give a sharp puff. This he did half a dozen times in quick succession. Then he would pause for a few minutes to allow the lamp-black to settle. He argued that if he puffed it all in at once, it would in all probability choke the occupants.

By the time they turned from the King's Road into Ebury Street, Bindle's task was accomplished—the lamp-black was exhausted.

"Victoria Station," he called out loudly to Tippitt. "Shan't be long now, mate. Another shower a-comin', better cover up these bloomin' 'oles," and he drew the tarpaulin over the rest of the roof. "Let 'em stoo a bit now," he muttered to himself. "That'll make 'em 'ot."

He had been conscious of suppressed coughing and sneezing from within, which he detected by placing his ear near the holes in the roof.

Opposite the Houses of Parliament, a lady came up to Bindle and handed him a key. "This is the key of the pantechnicon," she said loudly. "You are not to undo it until you reach Number 110, Downing Street. Do you understand?"

"Right-o!" remarked Bindle, "I got it."

"Now don't forget!" said the lady, and she disappeared swiftly in the direction of Victoria Street.

"No, I ain't goin' to forget," murmured Bindle to himself, "an' I shouldn't be

surprised if there was others wot ain't goin' to forget either."

He watched the lady who had given him the key well out of sight, then slipping off the tail-board of the van he walked swiftly along Whitehall.

A few yards south of Downing Street, an inspector of police was meditatively contemplating the flow of traffic north and south.

Bindle went up to him. "Pretend that I'm askin' the way, sir. I'm most likely bein' watched. I got a van wot's supposed to contain carved-oak furniture for Mr. Llewellyn John, 110, Downing Street. I think it's full o' suffragettes goin' to raid 'im. You get your men round there, the van'll be up in two ticks. Now point as if you was showing me Downing Street."

The inspector was a man of quick decision and, looking keenly at Bindle, decided that he was to be trusted.

"Right!" he said, then extending an official arm, pointed out Downing Street to Bindle. "Don't hurry," he added.

"Right-o!" said Bindle. "Joseph Bindle's my name. I'm a special, Fulham district."

The inspector nodded, and Bindle turned back to the van. A moment later the inspector strolled leisurely through the archway leading to the Foreign Office.

"That's Downing Street on the left," shouted Bindle to Tippitt as he came up, much to Tippitt's surprise. He was at a loss to account for many things that Bindle had done and said that day.

As they turned into Downing Street, Bindle was a little disappointed at finding only two constables; but he was relieved a a moment later by the sight of the inspector to whom he had spoken, hurrying through the archway, leading from the Foreign Office.

"Where are you going to?" called out the inspector to Tippitt, taking no notice of Bindle.

Tippitt jerked his thumb in the direction of Bindle, who came forward at that moment.

"Number 110, Downing Street, sir," responded Bindle. "Some furniture for Mr. Llewellyn John."

"Right!" said the inspector loudly; "but you'll have to wait a few minutes until that motor-car has gone."

Bindle winked as a sign of his acceptance of the mythical motor-car and, drawing the key of the pantechnicon from his pocket, showed it to the inspector, who, by closing his eyes and slightly bending his head, indicated that he understood.

Tippitt had decided that everybody was mad this morning. The police inspector's reference to a motor-car outside Number 110, whereas his eyes told him that there was nothing there but roadway and dust, had seriously undermined his respect for the Metropolitan Police Force. However, it was not his business. He was there to drive the horses, who in turn drew a van to a given spot; there his responsibility ended.

After a wait of nearly ten minutes, the inspector re-appeared. "It's all clear now," he remarked. "Draw up."

As the pantechnicon pulled up in front of Number 110, Bindle glanced up at the house and saw Mr. Llewellyn John looking out of one of the first-floor windows. He had evidently been apprised of what was taking place.

Bindle noticed that the doors of Number 110 and 111 were both ajar. He was, however, a little puzzled at the absence of police. The two uniformed constables had been reinforced by three others, and there were two obviously plain-clothes men loitering about.

"Now then, Tippy, get ready to lend me a 'and with this 'ere furniture," called out Bindle as he proceeded to insert the key in the padlock that fastened the doors of the van.

Tippitt, who had climbed down, was standing close to the tail-board facing the doors.

With a quick movement Bindle released the padlock from the hasp and, lifting the bar, stepped aside with an agility that was astonishing.

"Votes for Women! Votes for Women!! Votes for Women!!!"

Suddenly the placid quiet of Downing Street was shattered. The doors of the pantechnicon were burst open and thrown back upon their hinges, where they shivered as if trembling with fear. From the interior of the van poured such a

stream of humanity as Downing Street had never before seen.

Following Bindle's lead the inspector had taken the precaution of stepping aside; but Tippitt, unconscious that the van contained anything more aggressive than carved-oak furniture, was in the direct line of exit. At the moment the doors flew open he was in the act of removing his coat and, with his arms entangled in its sleeves, sat down with a suddenness that caused his teeth to rattle and his cigarette to fall from his lower lip.

Synchronising with the opening of the doors of the pantechnicon was a short, sharp blast of a police whistle. The effect was magical. Men seemed to pour into Downing Street from everywhere: from the archway leading to the Foreign Office, up the steps from Green Park, from Whitehall and out of Numbers 110 and 111. Plain-clothes and uniformed police seemed to spring up from everywhere; but no one took any notice of the fall of Tippitt. All eyes were fixed upon the human avalanche that was pouring from the inside of the pantechnicon. For once in its existence the Metropolitan Police Force was rendered helpless with astonishment. Women they had expected, women they were prepared for; but the extraordinary flood of femininity that cascaded out of the van absolutely staggered them.

There were short women and tall women, stout women and thin women, young women and—well, women not so young. The one thing they had in common was lamp-black. It was smeared upon their faces, streaked upon their garments; it had circled their eyes, marked the lines of their mouths, had collected round their nostrils. The heat inside the pantechnicon had produced the necessary moisture upon the fair faces and with this the lamp-black had formed an unholy alliance. Hats were awry, hair was dishevelled, frocks were limp and bedraggled.

The cries of "Votes for Women" that had heralded the triumphant outburst from the van froze upon their lips as the demonstrators caught sight of one another. Each gazed at the others in mute astonishment, whilst Tippitt, from his seat in the middle of the roadway, stared, wondering in a stupid way whether what he saw was the heat, or the five pints of ale he had consumed at Bindle's expense during the morning.

The inspector looked at Bindle curiously, and Bindle looked at the inspector with self-satisfaction, whilst the constables discovered that their unhappy anticipation of a rough and tumble with women, a thing they disliked, had been turned into a most delectable comedy.

At the first-floor window Mr. Llewellyn John watched the scene with keen enjoyment.

For a full minute the women stood gazing from one to the other in a dazed fashion. Finally one with stouter heart than the rest shouted "Votes for Women! This is a woman's war!"

But there was no answering cry from the ranks. Slowly it dawned upon each and every woman that in all probability she was looking just as ridiculous as those she saw about her. One girl produced a small looking-glass from a hand-bag. She gave one glance into it, and incontinently went into hysterics, flopping down where she stood.

The public, conscious that great events were happening in Downing Street, poured into the narrow thoroughfare, and the laughter denied the official police by virtue of discipline was heard on every hand.

"Christy Minstrels, ain't they?" enquired one youth of another with ponderous humour.

It was at the moment that one of them had raised a despairing cry of "Votes for Women," and had received no support.

"Votes for Women!" remarked one man shrewdly. "Soap for Women! is what they want."

"Fancy comin' out like that, even in wartime," commented another.

"'Ow'd they get like that?" enquired a third.

"Oh, you never know them suffragettes," remarked a fourth sagely; "they're always out for doing something different from what's been done before."

"Well, they done it this time," commented a little man with grey whiskers. "Enough to make Gawd 'Imself ashamed of us, them women is. Bah!" and he spat contemptuously.

The inspector felt that the time for action had arrived. Walking up to the unhappy group of twenty, he remarked in his most official tone:

"You cannot stand about here, you must be moving on."

"Moving on; but where?" They looked into each other's eyes mutely. Suddenly

an idea seemed to strike them and they turned instinctively to re-enter the van; but Bindle had anticipated this manœuvre, and had carefully closed, barred and padlocked the doors.

The inspector nodded approval. He had formed a very high opinion of Bindle's powers, although greatly puzzled by the whole business. At a signal from their superior, a number of uniformed constables formed up behind the forlorn band of females, several of whom were in tears.

"Move along there, please," they chorused, dexterously splitting up the group into smaller groups, and, finally, into ones and twos. Thus they were herded towards Whitehall.

"Will you call some cabs, please," said she who was obviously the leader. The inspector shook his head, whereat the woman smacked the face of the nearest constable, obviously with the intention of being arrested. Again the inspector shook his head. He had made up his mind that there should be no arrests that day. Nemesis had taken a hand in the game, and the inspector recognized in her one who is more powerful than the Metropolitan Police Force.

Slowly amidst the jeers of the crowd the twenty women were shepherded into Whitehall.

"Oh, please get me a taxi," appealed a little blonde woman with a hard mouth and what looked like a dark black moustache. "I cannot go about like this."

Suddenly one of their number was taken with shrieking hysterics. She sat down suddenly, giving vent to shriek after shriek, and beating a tattoo with the heels of her shoes upon the roadway; but no one took any notice of her and soon she rose and followed the others.

In Whitehall frantic appeals were made to drivers of taxicabs and conductorettes of omnibuses. None would accept such fares.

"It 'ud take a month to clean my bloomin' cab after you'd been in it," shouted one man derisively. "What jer want to get yourself in such a dirty mess for?"

"Go 'ome and wash the baby," shouted another.

Nowhere did the Black and White Raiders find sympathy or assistance. Two of the leaders of the Suffragette Movement, who happened to be passing down Whitehall, were attracted by the crowd. On learning what had happened, and

seeing the plight of the demonstrators, they continued on their way.

"This is war-time," one of them remarked to the other, "and they're disobeying the rules of the Association." With this they were left to their fate.

Some made for the Tube, others for the District Railway, whilst two sought out a tea-shop and demanded washing facilities; but were refused. The railway-stations were their one source of hope. For the next three hours passengers travelling to Wimbledon were astonished to see entering the train forlorn and dishevelled women, whose faces were rendered hideous by smears of black, and whose white frocks, limp and crumpled, looked as if they had been used to clean machinery.

"A pleasant little afternoon's treat for you, sir," remarked Bindle to the inspector, when the last of the raiders had disappeared. "Mr. John seemed to enjoy it." Bindle indicated the first-floor window of Number 110, with a jerk of his thumb.

"Was that your doing?" enquired the inspector.

"Well," replied Bindle, "it was an' it wasn't," and he explained how it had all come about.

"And what am I goin' to do with this 'ere van?" he queried.

"Better run it round to 'the Yard,' then you can take home the horses," replied the inspector.

"Right-o!" said Bindle.

"By the way," added the inspector, "I'm coming round myself. I should like you to see Chief-Inspector Gunny."

Bindle nodded cheerily. "'Ullo, Tippy!" he cried, "knocked you down, didn't they?"

Tippitt grinned, he had thoroughly enjoyed the entertainment and bore no malice.

"That's why you got the watering-can, mate?" he remarked.

Bindle surveyed him with mock admiration.

"Now ain't you clever," he remarked. "Fancy you a-seein' that. There ain't no spots on you, Tippy;" whereat Tippitt grinned again modestly.

That afternoon Bindle was introduced to the Famous Chief-Inspector Gunny of Scotland Yard, who, for years previously, had been the head of the department dealing with the suffragist demonstrations. He was a genial, large-hearted man, who had earned the respect, almost the liking of those whose official enemy he was. When he heard Bindle's story, he roared with laughter, and insisted that Bindle should himself tell about the Black and White Raiders to the Deputy-Commissioner and the Chief Constable. It was nearly four o'clock when Bindle left Scotland Yard, smoking a big cigar with which the Deputy-Commissioner had presented him.

Chief-Inspector Gunny's last words had been, "Well, Bindle, you've done us a great service. If at any time I can help you, let me know."

"Now I wonder wot 'e meant by that," murmured Bindle to himself. "Does it mean that I can 'ave a little flutter at bigamy, or that I can break 'Earty's bloomin' 'ead and not get pinched for it. Still," he remarked cheerfully, "it's been an 'appy day, a very 'appy day," and he turned in at The Feathers and ordered "somethink to wet this 'ere cigar."

CHAPTER III

THE AIR-RAID

I

"There wasn't no 'ome life in England until the Kayser started a-droppin' bombs in people's back-yards," remarked Bindle oracularly. "Funny thing," he continued, "'ow everybody seemed to find out 'ow fond they was of settin' at 'ome because they was afraid o' goin' out."

Mr. Hearty looked at Mr. Gupperduck and Mr. Gupperduck looked at Mrs. Bindle. They required time in which to assimilate so profound an utterance.

Mr. Gupperduck had firmly established himself in the good graces of Mr. Hearty and the leaders of the Alton Road Chapel. He was a constant visitor at the Heartys', especially at meal times, and at the chapel he prayed with great fervour, beating all records as far as endurance was concerned.

"I don't agree with you," remarked Mr. Gupperduck at length, "I do not agree with you. The Scriptures say, 'Every man to his family.'"

Mr. Hearty looked gratefully at his guest. It was pleasant to find Bindle controverted.

"You know, Alf, you never been so much at 'ome," wheezed Mrs. Hearty, hitting her chest remorselessly. "You never go out on moonlight nights."

"You trust 'im," said Bindle. "'Earty an' the moon ain't never out together."

"We are told to take cover," said Mr. Hearty with dignity.

"An' wot about us pore fellers wot 'as to be out in it all?" demanded Bindle, looking down at his special constable's uniform.

"You should commend yourself to God," said Mr. Gupperduck piously. "He that putteth his trust in Him shall not be afraid."

"Ain't you afraid then when there's a raid on?" demanded Bindle.

"I have no fear of earthly things," replied Mr. Gupperduck, lifting his eyes to the ceiling.

"'E's all Gupperduck an' camelflage, ain't 'e, Millikins?" whispered Bindle to his niece. Then aloud he said: "Well, Mrs. B. ain't like you! She's afraid like all the rest of us. I don't believe much in coves wot say they ain't afraid. You ask the boys back from France. You don't 'ear them a-sayin' they ain't afraid. They knows too much for that."

"There is One above who watches over us all, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty, emboldened to unaccustomed temerity by the presence of Mr. Gupperduck.

"Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck, "our lives and our happiness are in God's hands, wherefore should we feel afraid?"

"Well, well!" remarked Bindle, with resignation, "you an' 'Earty beat me when it comes to pluck. When I'm out with all them guns a-goin', an' bombs a-droppin' about, I'd sooner be somewhere else, an' I ain't a-goin' to say different. P'raps it's because I'm an 'eathen."

"The hour of repentance should not be deferred," said Mr. Gupperduck. "It is not too late even now."

"It's no good," said Bindle decisively. "I should never be able to feel as brave as wot you are when there's a raid on."

"'Oh ye of little faith!'" murmured Mr. Gupperduck mournfully.

"Think of Daniel in the lions' den," said Mrs. Bindle. "And Jonah in the—er—interior of the whale," added Mr. Hearty with great delicacy.

"No," remarked Bindle, shaking his head with conviction, "I wasn't made for lions, or whales. I suppose I'm a bit of a coward."

"I don't feel brave when there's a raid, Uncle Joe," said Millie Hearty loyally. She had been a silent listener. "And mother isn't either, are you, mums?" she turned to Mrs. Hearty.

"It's my breath," responded Mrs. Hearty, patting her ample bosom. "It gets me here."

"That's because you don't go to chapel, Martha," said Bindle. "If you was to turn up there three times on Sundays you'd be as brave as wot Mr. Gupperduck is.

Ain't that so?" he enquired, turning to Mr. Gupperduck.

"You're always sneering at the chapel," broke in Mrs. Bindle, without giving the lodger time to reply. "It doesn't do us any harm, whatever you may think."

"That's jest where you're wrong, Mrs. B.," remarked Bindle, settling himself down for a controversy. "I ain't got nothink to say against the chapel, if they'd only let you set quiet; but it's such an up an' down sort o' life. When you ain't kneelin' down a-askin' to be saved from wot you know you deserves, or kept from doin' wot you're nuts on doin', you're a-standin' up asingin' 'ymns about all sorts of uncomfortable things wot you says you 'opes to find in 'eaven."

"You have a jaundiced view of religion, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck ponderously. "A jaundiced view," he repeated, pleased with the phrase.

"'Ave I really?" enquired Bindle anxiously. "I 'ope it ain't catchin'. No," he continued meditatively, "I wasn't meant for chapels. I seem to be able to think best about 'eaven when I'm settin' smokin' after supper, with Mrs. B. a-bangin' at the stove to remind me that I ain't there yet."

"Wot does me," he continued, "is that I never yet see any of your chapel coves 'appier for all your singin' an' prayin'. Why is it? Look at you three now! If you was goin' to be plucked and trussed to-morrow, you couldn't look more fidgety."

Instinctively each of the three looked at the other two. Mr. Gupperduck shook his head hopelessly.

"You don't understand, Joseph," murmured Mr. Hearty with mournful resignation.

"I can understand Ruddy Bill gettin' drunk," Bindle continued, "because 'e do look 'appy when 'e's got a skin-full; but I can't understand you a-wantin' to pray, 'Earty, I can't really. I only once see a lot o' religious people 'appy, an' that was when they got drunk by mistake. Lord, didn't they teach me an' ole 'Uggles things! 'E blushes like a gal when I mentions it. 'Uggles 'as a nice mind, 'e 'as.

"Well, I must be goin', 'Earty, in case them 'Uns come over to-night. You ought to be a special, 'Earty, there's some rare fine gals on Putney 'Ill."

"Do you think there'll be an air-raid to-night?" asked Mr. Gupperduck with something more than casual interest in his voice.

"May be," said Bindle casually, "may be not. Funny things, air-raids, they've changed a rare lot o' things," he remarked meditatively. "Once we used to want the moon to come out, sort o' made us think of gals and settin' on stiles. Mrs. B. was a rare one for moons and stiles, wasn't you, Lizzie?"

"Don't be disgusting, Bindle." There was anger in Mrs. Bindle's voice.

"Now," continued Bindle imperturbably, "no cove don't want to go out an' set on a stile a-'oldin' of a gal's 'and: not 'im. When 'is job's done, 'e starts orf for 'ome like giddy-o, an' you don't see 'is nose again till the next mornin'."

Bindle paused to wink at Mr. Hearty.

"If there's any gal now," he continued, "wot wants 'er 'and 'eld on moonlight nights, she'll 'ave to 'old it 'erself, or wait till peace comes."

"If you would only believe, Mr. Bindle," said Mr. Gupperduck earnestly, making a final effort at Bindle's salvation. "'If thou canst believe, all things are possible.' Ah!"

Mr. Gupperduck started into an upright position with eyes dilated as a loud report was heard.

"What was that?" he cried.

"That," remarked Bindle drily, as he rose and picked up his peaked cap, "is the signal for you an' 'Earty to put your trust in Gawd. In other words," he added, "it's a gun, 'im wot Fulham calls 'The Barker.'"

Bindle looked from Mr. Hearty, leaden-hued with fright, to Mr. Gupperduck, whose teeth were chattering, on to Mrs. Bindle, who was white to the lips.

"Well, I must be orf," he said, adjusting his cap upon his head at a rakish angle. "If I don't come back, Mrs. B., you'll be a widow, an' widows are wonderful things. Cheer-o! all."

Bindle turned and left the room, his niece Millie following him out into the passage.

"Uncle Joe," she said, clutching hold of his coat sleeve, "you will be careful, won't you?" Then with a little catch in her voice, she added, "You know you are the only Uncle Joe I've got."

And Bindle went out into the night where the guns thundered and the shrapnel burst in sinister white stabs in the sky, whilst over all brooded the Great Queen of the heavens, bathing in her white peace the red war of pigmies.

II

Two hours later Bindle's ring at the Heartys' bell was answered by Millie.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" she cried joyfully, "I'm so glad you're back safe. Hasn't it been dreadful?" Her lower lip quivered a little.

"You ain't been frightened, Millikins, 'ave you?" enquired Bindle solicitously.

"A soldier's wife isn't afraid, Uncle Joe," she replied bravely. Millie's sweetheart, Charlie Dixon, was at the front.

"My! ain't we gettin' a woman, Millikins," cried Bindle, putting his arm affectionately round her shoulders and kissing her cheek loudly. "Everybody all right?" he enquired.

"Yes, I think so, Uncle Joe, but," she squeezed his arm, "I'm so glad you're back. I've been thinking of you all the time. Every time there was a big bang I—I wondered——"

"Well, well!" interrupted Bindle, "we ain't goin' to be down-'earted, are we? It's over now, you'll 'ear the 'All Clear' in a few minutes."

Bindle walked into the Heartys' parlour, where Mrs. Hearty was seated on the sofa half asleep.

"'Ullo, Martha!" he cried.

"Ah! Joe," she said, "I'm glad you're back. I'm afraid there's been a lot of——" Her breath failed her, and she broke off into a wheeze.

Bindle looked about him curiously.

"'Ullo! wot's 'appened to them three little cherubs?" he enquired.

Mrs. Hearty began to shake and wheeze with laughter, and Millie stood looking at Bindle.

"Wot's 'appened, Millikins?" he enquired. "Done a bunk, 'ave they?"

"They're—they're in the potato-cellar, Uncle Joe," said Millie without the ghost of a smile. Somehow it seemed to her almost like a reflection on her own courage that her father and aunt should have thought only of their personal safety.

Bindle slapped his leg with keen enjoyment. "Well, I'm blowed!" he cried, "if that ain't rich. Three people wot was talkin' about puttin' their trust in Gawd a-goin' into that little funk-'ole. Well, I'm blowed!"

"Don't laugh, Uncle Joe," began Millie, "I—I——" She broke off, unable to express what was in her mind.

"Don't you worry, Millikins," he replied as he moved towards the door. "I'd better go and tell 'em that it's all right."

Mr. Hearty's potato-cellar was reached through a trap-door flush with the floor of the shop.

With the aid of an electric torch, Bindle looked about him. His eyes fell on a large pair of scales, on which were weights up to 7 lbs. This gave him an idea. Carefully placing a box beside the trap-door, he lifted the scales and weights in his arms and, with great caution, mounted on to the top of the box. Suddenly he let the scales and weights fall with a tremendous crash, full in the centre of the trap-door, at the same time giving vent to a shout. Millie came running in from the parlour.

"Oh! Uncle Joe, what has happened?" she cried. "Are you hurt?"

"It's all right, Millikins, knocked over these 'ere scales I did. Ain't I clumsy? 'Ush!"

Moans and cries could be distinctly heard from below.

"'Ere, 'elp me gather 'em up, Millikins. I 'ope I 'aven't broken the scales."

Having replaced the scales and weights on the counter, Bindle proceeded to pull up the trap-door.

"All clear!" he shouted cheerily.

There was no response, only a moaning from the extreme corner of the cellar.

"'Ere, come along, 'Earty. Wot d'you two mean by takin' my missis down into a

cellar like that?"

"Is it gone?" quavered a voice that Bindle assumed must be that of Mr. Gupperduck.

"Is wot gone?" he enquired.

"The bomb," whispered the voice.

"Oh, come up, Gupperduck," said Bindle. "Don't play the giddy goat in the potato-cellar. Wot about you puttin' your trust in Gawd?"

There was a sound of movement below. A few moments later Mr. Gupperduck's face appeared within the radius of light. He had lost his spectacles and his upper set of false teeth. His hair was awry and his face distorted with fear. He climbed laboriously up the steps leading to the shop. He was followed by Mr. Hearty, literally yellow with terror.

"Wot 'ave you done with my missis?" demanded Bindle.

"She—she—she's down there," stuttered Mr. Gupperduck.

"Then you two jolly well go down and fetch 'er up, or I'll kick you down," cried Bindle angrily. "Nice sort of sports you are, leavin' a woman alone in an 'ole like that, after takin' er down there."

Mr. Hearty and Mr. Gupperduck looked at Bindle and then at each other. Slowly they turned and descended the ladder again. For some minutes they could be heard moving about below, then Mr. Hearty appeared with Mrs. Bindle's limp form clasped round the waist, whilst Mr. Gupperduck pushed from behind.

For one moment a grin flitted across Bindle's features, then, seeing Mrs. Bindle's pathetic plight, his manner changed.

"'Ere, Millikins, get some water," he cried. "Your Aunt Lizzie's fainted."

Between them they half-carried, half-dragged Mrs. Bindle into the parlour, where she was laid upon the sofa, vacated by Mrs. Hearty. Her hands were chafed, water dabbed upon her forehead, and a piece of brown paper burned under her nose by Mrs. Hearty.

She had not lost consciousness; but stared about her in a vague, half-dazed fashion.

Mr. Hearty and Mr. Gupperduck, who had retrieved his false teeth, seemed thoroughly ashamed of themselves. It was Mr. Hearty who suggested that Mrs. Bindle should spend the night with them, as she was not in a fit condition to go home.

As he spoke, the "All Clear" signal rang out joyfully upon the stillness without, two long-drawn-out notes that told of another twenty-four hours of safety. Mr. Gupperduck straightened himself, Mr. Hearty seemed to revive, and from Mrs. Bindle's eyes fled the expression of fear.

"Well, I must be orf," said Bindle. "Look after my missis, 'Earty. You comin' along, Mr. G.?" he enquired of Mr. Gupperduck, as, followed by Millie, he left the room.

"It was sweet of you not to laugh at them, Uncle Joe," said Millie, as they stood at the door waiting for Mr. Gupperduck.

"Nobody didn't ought to mind sayin' they're afraid, Millikins," said Bindle, looking at the serious face before him; "but I don't like a cove wot says 'e's brave, an' then turns out to 'ave about as much 'eart as a shillin' rabbit. Come along, Mr. G. Good night, Millikins, my dear. Are we down-'earted? No!" and Bindle went out into the night, followed by a meek and chastened Mr. Gupperduck.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUPLICATION OF MR. HEARTY

I

"You've never been a real husband to me," burst out Mrs. Bindle stormily.

Bindle did not even raise his eyes from his favourite dish of stewed-steak-and-onions.

"Cold mutton," he had once remarked to his friend, Ginger, "means peace, because I don't like it—the mutton, I mean; but stewed-steak-and-onions means an 'ell of a row. Mrs. B. ain't able to see me enjoyin' myself but wot she thinks I'm bein' rude to Gawd."

Bindle continued his meal in silent expectation.

"Look at you!" continued Mrs. Bindle. "Look at you now!"

Bindle still declined to be drawn into a discussion.

"Look at Mr. Hearty." Mrs. Bindle uttered her challenge with the air of one who plays the ace of trumps.

With great deliberation Bindle wiped the last remaining vestige of gravy from his plate with a piece of bread, which he placed in his mouth. With a sigh he leaned back in his chair.

"Personally, myself," he remarked calmly, "I'd rather not."

"Rather not what?" snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"Look at 'Earty," was the response.

"You might look at worse men than him," flashed Mrs. Bindle with rising wrath.

"I might," replied Bindle, "and then again I might not."

"Look how he's got on!" challenged Mrs. Bindle.

After a few moments of silence Bindle remarked more to himself than to Mrs. Bindle:

"Gawd made me, an' Gawd made 'Earty; but in one of us 'E made a bloomer. If I'm right, 'Earty's wrong; if 'Earty's right, I'm wrong. If they 'ave me in 'eaven, they won't want 'Earty; an' if 'Earty gets in, well, they won't look at me."

Mrs. Bindle proceeded to gather up the plates.

"Thank you for that stoo," said Bindle as he tilted back his chair contentedly.

"You should thank God, not me," was the ungracious retort.

For a moment Bindle appeared to ponder the remark. "Some'ow," he said at length, "I don't think I should like to thank Gawd for stewed-steak-an'-onions," and he drew his pipe from his pocket and began to charge it.

"Don't start smoking," snapped Mrs. Bindle, rising from the chair and going over to the stove.

Bindle looked up with interested enquiry on his features.

"There's an apple-pudding," continued Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle pocketed his pipe with a happy expression on his features. "Lizzie," he said, "'ow could you treat me like this?"

"What's the matter now?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"An apple-puddin' a-waitin' to be eaten, an' you lettin' me waste time a-talkin' about 'Earty's looks. It ain't kind of you, Lizzie, it ain't really."

Mrs. Bindle's sole response was a series of bangs, as she proceeded to turn out the apple-pudding.

Bindle ate and ate generously. When he had finished he pushed the plate from him and once more produced his pipe from his pocket.

"Mrs. B.," he said, "you may be a Christian; but you're a damn fine cook."

"Don't use such language to me," was the response, uttered a little less ungraciously than her previous remarks.

"It's all right, Mrs. B., don't you worry, they ain't a-goin' to charge that there

'damn' up against you. You're too nervous about the devil, you are," Bindle struck a match and sucked at his pipe.

"He's going to open another shop," said Mrs. Bindle.

"Who, the devil?" enquired Bindle in surprise.

"It's going to be in Putney High Street," continued Mrs. Bindle, ignoring Bindle's remark.

Bindle looked up at her with genuine puzzlement on his features.

"Putney 'Igh Street used to be a pretty 'ot place at night before the war," he remarked; "it ain't exactly cool now; but I never thought o' the devil openin' a shop there."

"I said Mr. Hearty," retorted Mrs. Bindle angrily.

"Oh! 'Earty," said Bindle contemptuously. "'Earty'd open anythink except 'is 'eart, or a barrel of apples 'e's sellin', knowin' them to be rotten. Wot's 'e want to open another shop for? 'E's got two already, ain't 'e?"

"Why haven't you got on?" stormed Mrs. Bindle inconsequently. "Why haven't you got three shops?"

"Well!" continued Bindle, "I might 'ave done so, but wot should I sell in 'em?"

"You never got on, you lorst every job you ever got. You'd 'ave lorst me long ago if——"

"No," remarked Bindle with solemn conviction as he rose and took his cap from behind the door. "You ain't the sort o' woman wot's lorst, Mrs. B., you're one o' them wot's found, like the little lamb that Ole Woe-and-Whiskers talked about when I went to chapel with you that night. S'long."

The news about Mr. Hearty's third venture in the greengrocery trade occupied Bindle's mind to the exclusion of all else as he walked in the direction of Chelsea to call upon Dr. Richard Little, whom he had met in connection with the Temperance Fête fiasco at Barton Bridge. He winked at only three girls and passed two remarks to carmen, and one to a bus-conductor, who was holding on rather unnecessarily to the arm of a pretty girl.

He found Dick Little at home and with him his brother Tom, and "Guggers,"

now a captain in the Gordons.

"Hullo! Here's J.B., gug-gug-good," cried Guggers, hurling his fourteen stone towards the diminutive visitor.

"Blessed if it ain't ole Spit-and-Speak in petticoats," cried Bindle. "I'm glad to see you, sir, that I am," and he shook Guggers warmly by the hand.

Guggers, as he was known at Oxford on account of his inability to pronounce a "G" without a preliminary "gug-gug," had taken a prominent part in the Oxford rag, when Bindle posed as the millionaire uncle of an unpopular undergraduate.

Bindle had christened him Spit-and-Speak owing to Gugger's habit of salivating his words.

When the men were seated, and Bindle was puffing furiously at a big cigar, he explained the cause of his visit.

"I ain't 'appy, sir," he said to Dick Little, "and although the 'ymn says "ere we suffer grief an' woe,' it don't say we got to suffer grief an' woe an' 'Earty, altogether."

"What's up, J.B.?" enquired Dick Little.

"Well, if the truth's got to be told, sir, I got 'Earty in the throat."

"Got what?" enquired Tom Little, grinning.

"'Earty, my brother-in-law, 'Earty. I 'ad 'im thrust down my throat to-night with stewed-steak-and-onions an' apple-puddin'. The stewed-steak and the puddin' slipped down all right; but 'Earty stuck."

"What's he been up to now?" enquired Dick Little.

"'E's goin' to open another shop in Putney 'Igh Street, that's number three. 'Earty with two shops give me 'ell; but with three shops it'll be 'ell and blazes."

"Gug-gug-gave you hell?" interrogated Guggers.

"Mrs. B.," explained Bindle laconically. Then after a pause he added, "No matter wot's wrong at 'ome, if the pipes burst through frost, or the butcher's late with the meat, or if it's a sixpenny milkman instead of a fivepenny milkman, Mrs. B. always seems to think it's through me not being like 'Earty, as if any man 'ud be like 'Earty wot could be like somethink else, even if it was a conchie. No,"

continued Bindle, "somethink's got to be done. That's why I come round this evenin'."

"Can't we gug-gug-get up a rag?" enquired Guggers. "If I gug-gug-go back to France without a rag we shall never beat the Huns."

For a few minutes the four men continued to smoke, Dick Little meditatively, Bindle furiously. It was Bindle who broke the silence.

"You may think I got a down on 'Earty, sir?" he said, addressing Dick Little. "Well, p'rap's I 'ave: but 'Eaven's sometimes a little late in punishin' people, an' I ain't above lendin' an 'and. 'Earty's afraid o' me because 'e's afraid of wot I may say, knowin' wot I know."

With this enigmatical utterance, Bindle buried his face in the tankard that was always kept for him at Dick Little's flat.

"We might of course celebrate the occasion," murmured Dick Little meditatively.

"Gug-gug-great Scott!" cried Guggers. "We will! Gug-gug-good old Dick!" He brought a heavy hand down on Dick Little's shoulder blade. "Out with it!"

For the next hour the four men conferred together, and by the time Bindle found it necessary to return to his "little grey 'ome in the west," the success of Mr. Hearty's third shop was assured, that is its advertisement was assured.

"It'll cost an 'ell of a lot of money," said Bindle doubtfully as he rose to go.

"Gug-gug-get out!" cried Guggers, whose income was an affair of five figures. "For a rag like that I'd gug-gug-give my—my——"

"Not your trousers, sir," interrupted Bindle, gazing down at Guggers' brawny knees; "remember you gone into short clothes. Wouldn't do for me to go about like that," he added, "me with my various veins."

And Bindle left Dick Little's flat, rich in the knowledge he possessed of coming events.

II

"Any'ow," remarked Bindle as he stood in front of the looking-glass over the kitchen mantelpiece, adjusting his special constable's cap at a suitable angle.

"Any'ow, 'Earty's got a fine day."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed and banged a vegetable-dish on the dresser. She appeared to possess an almost uncanny judgment as to how much banging a utensil would stand without breaking.

"Now," continued Bindle philosophically, "it's a fine day, the sun's shinin', people comin' out, wantin' to buy vegetables; yet I'll bet my whistle to 'is whole stock that 'Earty ain't 'appy."

"We're not here to be happy," snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"It ain't always easy to see why some of us is 'ere at all," remarked Bindle, as he gave his cap a further twist over to the right in an endeavour to get a real Sir David Beatty touch to his appearance.

"We're here to do the Lord's work," said Mrs. Bindle sententiously

"But d'you mean to tell me that Gawd made 'Earty specially to sell vegetables, 'im with a face like that?" questioned Bindle.

Mrs. Bindle's reply was in bangs. Sometimes Bindle's literalness was disconcerting.

"Did Gawd make me to move furniture?" he persisted. "No, Mrs. B.," he continued. "It's more than likely that Gawd jest puts us down 'ere an' lets us sort ourselves out, 'Im up there a-watchin' to see 'ow we does it."

"You're a child of Moloch, Joseph Bindle," said Mrs. Bindle.

"A child o' what-lock?" enquired Bindle "Who's 'e?"

"Oh! go along with you, don't bother me. I'm busy," cried Mrs. Bindle. "I promised Mr. Hearty I'd be round at two o'clock."

"Now ain't that jest like a woman," complained Bindle to a fly-catcher hanging from the gas-bracket. "Ain't that jest like a woman. If you're too busy to tell me why I'm a child of ole What-a-Clock, why ain't you too busy to tell me that I am a child of ole What-a-Clock?" and with this profound enquiry Bindle slipped out, assuring Mrs. Bindle that he would see her some time during the afternoon as he was to be on duty in Putney High Street, "to see that no one don't pinch 'Earty's veges."

Ten minutes later Bindle stood in front of Mr. Hearty's new shop, aided in his scrutiny by two women and three boys.

"There ain't no denying the fact," murmured Bindle to himself, "that 'Earty do do the thing in style. If only 'is 'eart wasn't wot it is, an' if 'is face was wot it might be, 'e'd make a damn fine brother-in-law."

At that moment Mr. Hearty appeared at the door of the shop, bowing out a lady-customer, obviously someone of importance to judge by the obsequious manner in which he rubbed his hands and bent his head.

"Cheer-o! 'Earty!" cried Bindle.

Mr. Hearty started and looked round. The three errand boys and the two women looked round also and fixed their gaze on Bindle. Mr. Hearty devoted himself more assiduously to his customer, pretending not to have heard.

"I'll run in about six, 'Earty, and 'ave a look round," continued Bindle. "I'm on dooty till then. I'll see they don't pinch your stock," and he walked slowly down the High Street in the direction of the bridge, followed by the grins and gazes of the errand boys.

Mr. Hearty's new shop was, without doubt, the best of the three. A study in green paint and brass-work, it was capable of holding its own with the best shops in the West End. In the window was a magnificent array of fruits. Outside were the vegetables. Everything was ticketed in plain figures, figures that were the envy and despair of other Putney greengrocers.

It was Mr. Hearty's hour.

As Bindle promenaded the High Street, his manner was one of expectancy. Twice he looked at his watch and, when walking in the direction of Putney Hill, he would turn and cast backward glances along the High Street. During his second perambulation he encountered Mrs. Bindle hurrying in the direction of Mr. Hearty's new shop. He accorded her a salute that would have warmed the heart of a Chief Commissioner of the Police.

Meanwhile Mr. Hearty was gazing lovingly at the curved double brass-rail that adorned his window, looking like a harvest festival decoration. Mr. Hearty believed in appearances. He would buy persimmons, li-chis, bread-fruit, and custard-apples, not because he thought he could sell them; but because they gave tone to his shop. Those who had not heard of persimmons and li-chis were

impressed because Mr. Hearty was telling them something they did not know; those who had heard of, possibly eaten, them were equally impressed, because he was reminding them of Regent Street and Piccadilly. As Bindle phrased it, Mr. Hearty was "a damn good greengrocer."

Mr. Hearty was interrupted in his contemplation of the fruity splendour of his genius by the entry of a customer, at least something had come between him and the light of the sun.

He turned, started violently and stared. Then he blinked his eyes and stared again. A man had entered wearing a silk-faced frock-coat of dubious fit and doubtful age, a turn-down collar, a white tie and trousers that concertinaed over large ill-shaped boots. On his head was a black felt hat, semi-clerical in type, insured against any sudden vagary of the wind by a hat-guard.

Mr. Hearty gazed at the man, his eyes dilated in astonishment. He stared at the stranger's sunken, sallow cheeks, at his heavy moustache, at his mutton-chop whiskers. The man was his double: features, expression, clothes; all were the same.

"'Ullo! 'Earty! Put me down for a cokernut an' an onion."

Bindle, who had entered at that moment, dug the stranger in the ribs from behind. He turned round upon his assailant, then Bindle saw Mr. Hearty standing in the shadow. He looked from him to the stranger and back again with grave intentness. Both men regarded Bindle.

"Good afternoon, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty at length in his toneless voice, that always seemed to come from somewhere in the woolly distance.

"Good afternoon, Joseph," said the stranger in a voice that was a very clever imitation of that of Mr. Hearty.

Bindle fumbled in the breast-pocket of his tunic and produced a box of matches. Going up to Mr. Hearty he struck a match. Mr. Hearty started back as if doubtful of his intentions. Bindle proceeded to examine Mr. Hearty's features by the flickering light of the match, then turning to the stranger, he went through the same performance with him. Finally pushing his cap back he scratched his head in perplexity.

"Well, I'm damned!" he ejaculated. "Two 'Earty's."

"I want a cauliflower, please." It was the stranger who spoke.

Bindle once more proceeded to regard the stranger critically.

"I s'pose you're what they call an alibi," he remarked.

The stranger had no time to reply, as at that moment another man entered. In garb and appearance he was a replica of the first. Mr. Hearty looked as a man might who, without previous experience of alcohol, has just drunk a whole bottle of whisky.

Bindle whistled, grinned, then he smacked his leg vigorously.

"My cauliflower, please," said the first man.

"Good afternoon, Joseph," said the new arrival. The voice was not so good an imitation.

At that moment Smith, Mr. Hearty's right-hand man, thrust his head through the flap in the floor of the shop that gave access to the potato-cellar. He caught sight of the trinity of masters. He gave one frightened glance, ducked his head, and let the flap down with a bang just as a third "Mr. Hearty" entered. He was followed almost immediately by a fourth and fifth. Each greeted Bindle with a "Good-afternoon, Joseph."

Just as the sixth Mr. Hearty entered, Smith pushed up the flap again, this time a few inches only, and with dilated eyes looked out. The sight of seven "masters," as he afterwards confessed to Billy Nips, the errand boy, "shook 'im up crool." Keeping his eyes fixed warily upon the group of men, each demanding a cauliflower, Smith slowly drew himself up and out, letting the cellar-flap down with a bang as he slipped to the back of the shop away from the group. Was he drunk, or only dreaming?

"I woke up with one brother-in-law, an' now I got seven," cried Bindle as he walked over and opened the glass-door, with white lace curtains tied back with blue ribbon, at the back of the shop.

"Martha," he shouted, "Martha, you're wanted!"

An indistinct sound was heard and a minute later Mrs. Hearty appeared, enormously fat and wheezing painfully.

"That you, Joe?" she panted as she struck her ample bosom with clenched hand.

"My breath! it's that bad to-day." For a moment she stood blinking in the sunlight.

"See 'em, Martha?" ejaculated Bindle, pointing to Mr. Hearty and the "alibis." "Seven of 'em. You're a bigamist, sure as eggs, Martha, an' Millie ain't never goin' to be an orphan."

As she became accustomed to the glare of the sunlight, Mrs. Hearty looked in a dazed way at the group of "husbands," all gazing in her direction. Then she suddenly began to shake and wheeze. It took very little to make Mrs. Hearty laugh, sometimes nothing at all. Now she sat down suddenly on a sack of potatoes and heaved and shook with silent laughter.

Suddenly Mr. Hearty became galvanised into action.

"How—how dare you!" he fumed. "Get out of my shop, confound you!"

"'Earty, 'Earty!" protested Bindle, "fancy you a-usin' language like that. I'm surprised at you."

Mr. Hearty looked about him like a caged animal, then suddenly he turned to Bindle.

"Joseph," he cried, "I give these men in charge."

The men regarded Mr. Hearty with melancholy unconcern.

"Give 'em in charge!" repeated Bindle in surprise. "Wot for?"

"They're—they're like me," stammered Mr. Hearty in a rage that, with a man of more robust nature, must have found vent in physical violence.

"Well," remarked Bindle judicially, "I can't run a cove in for bein' like you, 'Earty. Although," he added as an afterthought, "'e ought to be in quod."

"It's a scandal," stuttered Mr. Hearty, "it's a—a——" He broke off, words were mild things to express his state of indignation. Turning to Bindle he cried, "Joseph, turn them out of my shop, in—in the name of the Law," he added melodramatically.

"You 'ear, sonnies?" remarked Bindle, turning to the passive six. "'Op it, although," he added meditatively as he eyed the six duplicates, "wot I'm to do with you if you won't go, only 'Eaven knows, an' 'Eaven don't confide in me."

The six figures themselves settled Bindle's problem by marching solemnly out of the shop, each with a "Good afternoon, Joseph."

"Joseph, what is the meaning of this?" demanded Mr. Hearty, turning to Bindle as the last black-coated figure left the shop. "What is the meaning of this?"

"You may search me, 'Earty," replied Bindle. "I should 'ave called 'em twins, if there 'adn't been so many. Sort o' litter, wasn't it? 'Ope they're all respectable, or there'll be trouble for you, 'Earty. You'd better wear a bit o' ribbon round your arm, so's we shall know you."

"Bindle, you're at the bottom of this." Mrs. Bindle had come out of the back-parlour, just as the duplicates were leaving. She regarded her husband with a suspicion that amounted to certainty.

"Me?" queried Bindle innocently; "me at the bottom of wot?"

"You know something about these men. It's a shame, and this Mr. Hearty's first day. Look how it's upset him."

"Now 'ow d'you think I could make six alibis like them——" Bindle's defence was interrupted by the sound of music.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed, "if it ain't them alibis."

The "doubles" had all produced tin whistles, which they were playing as they marched slowly up and down in front of Mr. Hearty's premises. Five seemed to have selected each his own hymn without consultation with his fellows; the sixth, probably a secularist, had fallen back upon "The Men of Harlech."

A crowd was already gathering.

Mr. Hearty looked about him like a hunted rat, he rushed to the shop door, desperation in his eyes, violence in his mind. Before he had an opportunity of coming to a decision as to his course of action, a new situation arose, that distracted his thoughts from the unspeakable "alibis."

CHAPTER V

THE GATHERING OF THE BANDS

From the direction of Putney Bridge a large crowd was approaching. People were leaning over the sides of omnibuses, staring out of the windows of trams, boys were whistling and exchanging comments, the purport of which Mr. Hearty could not quite catch. In this new excitement he forgot the "alibis," who gradually became absorbed in the growing throng that collected outside the shop.

Mr. Hearty gazed at the approaching multitude, misgiving in his soul. He caught a glimpse of what looked like a pineapple walking in the midst of the crowd, next he saw a carrot, then an orange. He turned away, blinked his eyes and looked again. This time he saw, moving in his direction, an enormous bean, followed by a potato. Yes, there was no doubt about it, fruit and vegetables were walking up Putney High Street!

As they came nearer he saw that each vegetable was leading a donkey, on whose back were two boards, meeting at the top, thus forming a triangle, the base of which was strapped to the animal's back. People were pointing to the boards and laughing. Mr. Hearty could not see what was written on them.

The sensation was terrific. A group of small boys who had run on ahead took up a position near the door of Mr. Hearty's shop.

"That's 'im," cried one, "that's Napoleon."

"No, it ain't," said another, "that's Caesar."

Mechanically Mr. Hearty waved the boys away. They repeated words that to him were meaningless, and then pointed to the approaching crowd. Mr. Hearty was puzzled and alarmed.

"Look! guv'nor, there they are," shouted one of the boys.

Instinctively Mr. Hearty looked. At first he beheld only the donkeys, the animated fruit and the approaching crowd, then he suddenly saw his own name. A motor omnibus intervened. A moment later the donkeys and their boards came into full view. Mr. Hearty gasped.

On their boards were ingenious exhortations to the public to support the enterprise of Alfred Hearty, greengrocer, of Putney, Fulham and Wandsworth. Mr. Hearty read as one in a dream:

ALFRED HEARTY
THE NAPOLEON OF GREENGROCERS

ALFRED HEARTY
THE CAESAR OF FRUITERERS

ALFRED HEARTY
THE PRINCE OF POTATO MERCHANTS

HEARTY'S TWO-SHILLING PINEAPPLE
TRY IT IN YOUR BATH

HEARTY'S JERUSALEM ARTICHOKES
GENERAL ALLENBY EATS THEM

THE GERMANS FIGHT FOR
HEARTY'S BRUSSELS SPROUTS

As the six animals filed past, Mr. Hearty was conscious that hundreds of eyes were gazing in his direction. He read one sign after another as if hypnotised, then he read them again. Scarcely had the animals passed him, when the pineapple swung round leading his donkey, the others immediately followed. As they came back on the other side of the way, that nearest to Mr. Hearty, he had the benefit of reading further details about the wonderful properties of the fruit and vegetables he retailed. The second set of exhortations to the housewives of Putney ran:

EAT HEARTY'S FILBERTS, OH! GILBERT,
THE NUT
NUT-CRACKERS WITH EVERY BAG

HEARTY'S FRENCH BEANS
SAVED VERDUN

TRY HEARTY'S JUICY CABBAGES
THEY CURE BALDNESS

THE FOOD CONTROLLER RECOMMENDS CARROTS
TRY HEARTY'S—I HAVE

ALFRED HEARTY
KNOWN AS PINEAPPLE ALF

IF YOU DON'T BUY YOUR VEGETABLES
FROM ALFRED HEARTY
YOU WILL BE WHAT I AM

The last-named was particularly appreciated, everybody being able to see the joke and, thinking that no one else had been so clever, each took infinite pains to point it out to his neighbour.

At first Mr. Hearty went very white, then, realising that the crowd was laughing at him, and that he was being rendered ridiculous, he flushed crimson,—turning round he walked into the shop. There was a feeling in his throat and eyes that reminded him of what he had felt as a child after a storm of crying. His brain seemed deadened. From out the general hum he heard a boy's shrill voice enquiring the whereabouts of his mate, and the mate's reply was heard in the distance.

Suddenly a new sensation dwarfed that of the donkeys.

"Here's another! here's another!" yelled a shrill voice.

The crowd looked up the High Street towards the bridge. With stately lope a camel was pursuing its majestic way. On its back was an enormous water-melon, through which appeared the head of the driver shaded by leaves, a double stalk concealing his legs.

From the shelter of the double brass-rail Mr. Hearty watched the camel as if fascinated. The donkeys had come to a standstill outside the shop. Behind him stood Mrs. Bindle and Smith, the one very grim, the other grinning expansively, whilst from the gloom behind, Mrs. Hearty was heard wheezing and demanding what it was all about.

With stately and indifferent tread the camel approached, with head poised rather like a snake about to strike. Slung over its back on each side were notices. The one Mr. Hearty first saw read:

I'VE GOT THE HUMP
THROUGH NOT BUYING HEARTY'S VEGETABLES

As the beast swung round, the other motto presented itself:

EAT HEARTY'S LEEKS
THEY DEFY THE PLUMBER

Cheers, cat-calls, loud whistlings and the talk of an eager, excited Saturday-afternoon crowd formed a background to the picture.

"Well, I'm blowed!" muttered Bindle, who had read the notices with keen relish. "Well, I'm blowed! They done it in style."

The excitement was at its height when the steady pounding of a drum was heard in the distance. As it drew nearer, the attention of the crowd was attracted from the donkeys and the camel. Putney was in luck, and it looked gratefully in the direction of where Mr. Hearty stood, a shadowy form behind his double brass-rail.

Bindle recognised the tune the band was playing as that of Mr. Hearty's favourite hymn, "Pull for the Shore, Sailor." As the band entered the High Street, another was heard in the opposite direction.

Bindle turned into the shop and walked up to his brother-in-law, who still stood staring at the strange and curious beasts that were advertising his wares.

"Look 'ere, 'Earty," he said, in his most official manner, "this may be all very well in the way of business; but you're blocking the 'ole bloomin' 'Igh Street."

Mr. Hearty gazed at Bindle with unseeing eyes.

"These bands yours, too, 'Earty?" Bindle enquired.

Mr. Hearty shook his head in hopeless negation. Nothing was his, not even the power to move and rout this scandalous, zoological-botanical exhibition.

"Well, wot are they a-playin' 'ymns for?" demanded Bindle.

"Hymns?" enquired Mr. Hearty in a toneless voice.

"Yes, can't you 'ear 'em?" Bindle gazed at his brother-in-law curiously. "Enough to blow your 'ead orf."

The first band was now blaring out its "Pull for the Shore, Sailor," with full force. At its head walked a man carrying a representation of a cabbage, on which was painted:

HEARTY FOR CABBAGES

The bandsmen wore strangely nondescript clothes. With one exception they all seemed to possess the uniform cap, that exception was a man in khaki. Four of them had caps without tunics. Only one had the full regulation uniform; but he was wearing odd boots. The bandmaster, in a braided frock-coat, which reached well below his knees, was spasmodically putting in bits on a cornet; he was short of stature with a constricted wind, and the pace was fast.

The second band approached, the man at its head bearing a carrot with a similar legend as that of the rival concern; but in relation to carrots. "Onward, Christian Soldiers" was its melody. The noise became diabolical. The second band had uniform caps only, and two of its members had taken off their coats and hung them over their shoulders. It was a hot and tiring day.

At the moment when the second band was within a hundred yards of the shop, the camel raised its head and gave vent to its terrifying roar, a rather indifferent attempt to imitate that of a lion.

The "Onward, Christian Soldiers" band was the first to reach the shop, having a shorter distance to traverse. Its leader was a tall man with a weary face, and a still more weary moustache. His waistcoat was unbuttoned, and his face dripping with perspiration as he blew out what brains he possessed upon a silver cornet. He marched straight up to the door of the shop, blowing vigorously. Suddenly a double beat of the drum gave the signal to stop. Taking off his cap, with the back of his hand he wiped the sweat from his brow. Pushing past Mr. Hearty he entered, a moment after followed by his eleven confrères.

For a moment Mr. Hearty stared, then he retreated backwards before the avalanche of musicians.

"What do you want?" he demanded feebly.

"This the way upstairs, guv'nor?" enquired the tall man.

"Upstairs?" interrogated Mr. Hearty.

"Yus, upstairs, like me to say it again?" queried the man who was tired and short-

tempered.

"But, what——?" began Mr. Hearty.

"Oh, go an' roast yourself!" responded the man. "Come along, boys," and they tramped through the back-parlour. Mr. Hearty heard them pounding up the stairs.

The drum, however, refused to go through the narrow door. The drummer tried it at every conceivable angle. At last he recognised that he had met his Waterloo.

"Hi, Charlie!" he yelled.

"'Ullo! That you, Ted?" came the reply from above.

"Ruddy drum's stuck," yelled the drummer, equally hot and exasperated.

"Woooot?" bawled Charlie.

"Ruddy drum won't go up," cried Ted.

"All right, you stay down there, you can 'ear us and keep time," was the response.

The drummer subsided on to a sack of potatoes. Mr. Hearty approached him.

"What are you doing here? You're not my band," he said, eyeing the man apprehensively.

The drummer looked up with the insolence of a man who sees before him indecision.

"Who the blinkin' buttercups said we was?" he demanded.

"But what are you doing here?" persisted Mr. Hearty.

"Oh!" responded the man with elaborate civility, "we come to play forfeits, wot jer think?"

At that moment from the room above the shop the band broke into full blast with "Shall We Gather at the River." The drummer made a grab at his sticks, but was late, and for the rest of the piece, was a beat behind in all his bangs.

Mr. Hearty looked helplessly about him. Another cheer from without caused him to walk to the door. Outside, the "Pull for the Shore, Sailor," faction was performing valiantly. Their blood was up, and they were determined that no one

should gather at the river if they could prevent it.

In the distance several more bands were heard, and the pounding became terrific. All traffic had been stopped, and an inspector of police was pushing his way through the crowd in the direction of Mr. Hearty. Bindle joined the inspector, saluting him elaborately.

The inspector eyed Mr. Hearty with official disapproval.

"You must send these men away, sir," he said with decision.

"But—but," said Mr. Hearty, "I can't."

"But you must," said the inspector. "There will be a summons, of course," he added warningly.

"But—why?" protested Mr. Hearty.

The inspector looked at Mr. Hearty, and then gazed up and down Putney High Street. He was annoyed.

"You have blocked the whole place, sir. We've had to stop the trams coming round the Putney Bridge Road. Hi!" he shouted to the drummer who was conscientiously earning his salary.

"Stop that confounded row there!"

The man did not hear.

"Stop it, I say!" shouted the inspector.

The drummer stopped.

"Wot's the matter?" he enquired.

"You're causing an obstruction," said the inspector warningly.

"Ted!" yelled the voice of the leader at the top of the house, who was gathering at the river upon the cornet in a fine frenzy, "wot the 'ell are you stoppin' for?"

"It's the pleece," yelled back Ted informatively.

"The cheese?" bawled back Charlie. "Shouldn't eat it; it always makes you ill. Go ahead and bang that ruddy drum."

"Can't," yelled Ted. "They'll run me in."

The leader was evidently determined not to bandy words with his subordinate. He could be heard pounding down the stairs two at a time, still doing his utmost to interpret the pleasures awaiting Putney in the hereafter. The cornet could be heard approaching nearer and nearer becoming brassier and brassier. The leader was a note behind the rest by the time he had got to the bottom of the stairs. Arrived in the shop he stopped suddenly at the sight of the inspector.

"Tell them to stop that infernal row," ordered the officer.

He, who had been addressed as Charlie, looked from Mr. Hearty to the inspector.

"There ain't no law that can stop me," he said with decision, "I'm on the enclosed premises. Go ahead, Ted," he commanded, turning to the drummer, "take it out of 'er," and, resuming his cornet, Charlie picked up the tune and raced up the stairs again, leaving Ted "taking it out of 'er" in a way that more than made up for the time he had lost.

The inspector bit his lip. Turning to Mr. Hearty he said, "You will be charged with causing obstruction with all this tomfoolery."

"But—but—it isn't mine," protested Mr. Hearty weakly. "I know nothing about it."

"Nonsense!" said the inspector. "Look at those animals out there."

Mr. Hearty looked, and then looked back at the inspector, who said something; but Mr. Hearty could only see the movement of his lips. The babel became almost incredible. Three more bands had arrived, making five altogether, and there was a sound in the distance that indicated the approach of others. For the first time in his life Ted was experiencing the sweets of being able legally to defy the law, and he was enjoying to the full a novel experience.

At that moment Mrs. Bindle pushed her way into the shop. She had been out to get a better view of what was taking place. She stopped and stared from Mr. Hearty to the inspector, and then back to Mr. Hearty.

"I—I don't know what it means," he stammered, feeling that something was required of him; but no one heard him.

Bindle, who had hitherto been quiet in the presence of his superior officer, now

took a hand in matters.

"Look 'ere, 'Earty," he shouted during a lull in the proceedings, "advertisement's advertisement, an' very nice too, but this 'ere is obstruction. Ain't that right, sir?" he said, addressing the inspector; but the inspector did not hear him, it is doubtful if Mr. Hearty heard, for at that moment there had turned into the High Street from Wandsworth Bridge Road a double-drummed band playing something with a slight resemblance to "Gospel Bells," a melody that gives a wonderful opportunity for the trombones.

There were now one band upstairs and five in the High Street, as near to the shop as they could cluster, and a seventh approaching. All were striving to interpret Moody and Sankey as Moody and Sankey had never been interpreted before.

The inspector walked out on to the pavement, and vainly strove to signal to two of his men whose helmets could be seen among the crowd.

Mr. Hearty's eyes followed the officer, but he soon became absorbed in other things. From the Wimbledon end of the High Street he saw bobbing about in the crowd a number of brilliant green caps with yellow braid upon them. The glint of brass in their neighbourhood forewarned him that another band was approaching. From the bobbing movement of the caps, it was obvious that the men were fighting their way in the direction of his, Mr. Hearty's shop.

Glancing in the other direction, Mr. Hearty saw a second stream of dark green and red caps, likewise making for him. When the leader of the green and yellow caps, a good-natured little man carrying a cornet, burst through the crowd, it was like spring breaking in upon winter. The brilliant green tunic with its yellow braid was dazzling in the sunlight, and Mr. Hearty blinked his eyes several times.

"'Ot day, sir," said the little man genially as he took off his cap and, with the edge of his forefinger, removed the sweat from his brow, giving it a flick that sent some of the moisture on to Mr. Hearty, causing him to start back suddenly.

"Sorry, sir," said the man apologetically. "Afraid I splashed you. I suppose we go right through and up. Come along, Razor," he yelled to the last of his bandsmen, a thin, weedy youth, who was still vainly endeavouring to cut his way through the crowd.

Suddenly the little man saw the first drummer banging away vigorously.

"'Ullo, got another little lot inside! You don't 'alf know 'ow to advertise, mister," he said admiringly.

This reminded Mr. Hearty that he possessed a voice.

"There is some mistake. I have not ordered any band," he shouted in the little man's ear.

"Wot?" shouted the little man.

Mr. Hearty repeated his assurance.

"Not ordered any band. Seem to 'ave ordered all the bands in London, as far as I can see," he remarked, looking at the rival concerns. "Sort of Crystal Palace affair. You ordered us, any'ow," he added.

"But I didn't," persisted Mr. Hearty. "This is all a mistake."

"Oh, ring orf!" said the leader. "People don't pay in advance for what they don't want. Come along, boys," he cried and, pushing his way along the shop, he passed through the parlour door and was heard thumping upstairs.

"You can't get through," shouted Ted to the second drummer, a mournful-looking man with black whiskers.

"Wot?" he bawled dully.

"Can't get through," yelled Ted.

"Why?" roared the whiskered man.

"Ruddy drum won't go up," shouted Ted.

"Oh!" said the second drummer and, without testing the accuracy of Ted's words, he seated himself upon a barrel of apples, his drum still in position.

There was a sound of loud altercations from above. After a minute they subsided, and the volume of tone increased, showing that Charlie had found expression in his cornet.

"Where's Striker?" came the cry.

"Strikeeeeeeeer!" yelled several voices.

"'Ullo!" howled Striker in a muffled voice.

"We're all ready. Wot the 'ell are you doin', Striker?" came the response.

"Drum won't come up," bawled Striker.

"Wot?"

"Drum won't come up, too big."

"Right-o! you can pick us up," came the leader's reply.

A moment later "Onward, Christian Soldiers," broke out in brassy rivalry to "Shall We Gather at the River."

Mrs. Hearty and Mrs. Bindle fled into the parlour.

It is obvious that whatever phenomenon eternity may have to discover to man, it will not be Christian soldiers gathering at the river. The noise was stupendous. The stream of brassy discord that descended from above was equalled only by the pounding of the two drums that rose from below.

Ted had made some reflections upon the whiskers of the second drummer, with the result that, forgetting their respective bands, they were now engaged in a personal contest, thumping and pounding against each other with both sticks. The sweat poured down their faces, and their mouths were working, each expressing opinions, which, however, the other could not hear. At that moment the dark green caps with red braid began to trickle into the shop.

Bindle, who had been a delighted spectator of the arrival of band after band, suggested to the leader of the eighth band in a roar that just penetrated to the drum of his ear, "'Adn't you better start 'ere, there ain't no room upstairs?"

The man gave a comprehensive look round, then by signs indicated to his men that they were to start then and there. They promptly broke out into "The Last Noel." Bindle ran from the shop, his fingers in his ears.

"Oh, my Gawd! they'll bring the 'ole bloomin' 'ouse down," he muttered. "I 'ope they don't play 'ymns in 'eaven—them drums!"

Mr. Hearty, who had been pushed into a corner behind an apple barrel, stood and gazed about him. There was a dazed look in his eyes, as of one who does not comprehend what is taking place. He looked as if at any moment he might become a jibbering lunatic.

A wild cheer from the crowd attracted his attention. He looked out. Pushing their way towards the shop was a number of vegetables: a carrot, a turnip, a cabbage, a tomato, a cucumber, a potato, a marrow, to name only a few. Each seemed to be on legs and was playing an instrument of some description.

Was he mad? Could that really be a melon playing the drum? Did bananas play cornets? Could cucumbers draw music from piccolos? Mr. Hearty blinked his eyes. Here indeed was a dream, a nightmare. He saw Bindle with an inspector and a constable turn the vegetables back, obviously denying them admission. He watched as one who has no personal interest in the affair. He saw the inspector enter with three constables, he saw the green and red band ejected, Ted and the whiskered man silenced, Charlie and the short genial man brought down protesting from upstairs.

He saw the inspector's busy pencil fly from side to side of his notebook, he saw Bindle grinning cheerfully as he exchanged remarks with the bandsmen, he saw what looked like a never-ending procession of bandsmen stream past him.

He saw everything, he believed nothing. Perhaps it was brain fever. He had worked very hard over his new shop. If he were to die, Smith could never carry on the three businesses. What would become of them? He further knew that his afternoon trade was ruined, that he would probably be summoned for something that he had not done, and tears came to his eyes.

In Mr. Hearty's soul was nothing of the patience and long-suffering of the martyr. Behind him, above him and in front of him he still seemed to hear the indescribable blare of brass. Outside were the cheers of the crowd and the vain endeavours of the police to grapple with the enormous problem that had been set them. What could it all mean?

In the kitchen behind the parlour sat Mrs. Hearty wheezing painfully. Opposite to her stood Mrs. Bindle, tight-lipped and grim.

"That Bindle's done this," she muttered to herself. "It'll kill Mr. Hearty."

CHAPTER VI

MR. GUPPERDUCK'S MISHAP

"I've been out all day waiting in queues," remarked Mrs. Bindle complainingly, "and all I got was two candles and a quarter of a pound of marjarine."

"An' which are we goin' to 'ave for breakfast to-morrow?" enquired Bindle cheerfully.

"Yes, a lot you care!" retorted Mrs. Bindle, "coming home regular to your meals and expecting them to be ready, and then sitting down and eating. A lot you care!" she repeated.

"Wot jer want to take a lodger for," demanded Bindle, "if you can't get food enough for you an' me?"

"Doesn't his money help us pay our way?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"But wot's the good of 'avin' more money, Mrs. B., if you can't get enough food to go round?"

"That's right, go on!" stormed Mrs. Bindle. "A lot of sympathy I get from you, a lot you care about me walking myself off my feet, so long as your stomach's full."

Bindle scratched his head in perplexity, but forbore to retort; instead he hummed Mrs. Bindle's favourite hymn "Gospel Bells."

"Look what you done to Mr. Hearty, that Saturday," cried Mrs. Bindle.

"Me!" said Bindle, cursing himself for reminding her by humming the hymn.

"Yes, you!" was the reply. "He had to go to the police-court."

"Well, it's made 'is fortune, an' 'e got orf," replied Bindle.

"Yes, but it might have ruined him. You wouldn't have cared, and in war-time too," Mrs. Bindle added.

"Well, well! the war'll be over some day," said Bindle cheerfully.

"That's what you always say. Why don't they make peace?" demanded Mrs. Bindle, as if Bindle himself were the sole obstacle to the tranquillisation of the world. Mrs. Bindle sat down with a decisiveness that characterised all her movements.

"Sometimes I wish I was dead," she remarked. "There's nothin' but inching and pinching and slaving my fingers to the bone trying to make a shilling go further than it will, and yet they won't make peace."

"Mrs. B.," remarked Bindle, "you best keep to cookin', you're a dab at that, and leave politics to them wot understands 'em. You can't catch a mad dog by puttin' salt on 'is tail. I wonder where ole Guppy is," he continued, glancing at the kitchen clock, which pointed to half-past nine. "It ain't often 'e lets praying get in the way of 'is meals."

"I hope nothing has happened to him," remarked Mrs. Bindle a little anxiously.

"No fear o' that," replied Bindle regretfully. "Things don't 'appen to men like Gupperduck; still it's funny 'im missin' a meal," he added.

At a quarter to ten Mrs. Bindle reluctantly acquiesced in Bindle's demand for supper. She was clearly anxious, listening intently for the familiar sound of Mr. Gupperduck's key in the outer door.

"I wonder what could have happened?" she said as the clock indicated a quarter past ten and she rose to clear away.

"P'raps 'e's been took up to 'eaven like that cove wot 'Earty was talkin' about the other night," suggested Bindle.

Mrs. Bindle's sniff intimated that she considered such a remark unworthy of her attention.

"Ah! King Richard is 'isself again!" remarked Bindle, pushing his plate from him, throwing himself back in his chair, and proceeding to fill his pipe, indifferent as to what happened to the lodger.

Mrs. Bindle busied herself in putting Mr. Gupperduck's supper in the oven to keep warm.

"Funny sort of job for a man to take up," remarked Bindle conversationally, as

he lighted his pipe, "preaching at people wot only laughs back."

"Oh! you think so, do you!" snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"I was listenin' to 'em one afternoon in Regent's Park," remarked Bindle. "Silly sort o' lot they seemed to me."

"You're nothing but a heathen yourself," accused Mrs. Bindle.

"As long as a cove keeps 'is religion to 'imself, I don't see it matters to nobody wot 'e thinks, any more than whether 'e wears blue or pink pants under his trousers."

"Don't be disgusing, Bindle," snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"Disgustin'! what's disgustin'?"

"Talking of what you talked of," replied Mrs. Bindle with asperity.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Bindle. "There you 'angs 'em on the line on Mondays for everybody to see, and yet you mustn't talk about 'em; well, I'm blowed!" he repeated.

"What do they say in the park?" questioned Mrs. Bindle curiously.

"Oh! they says a lot o' things," replied Bindle. "Personally myself I think the atheists is the funniest. There was one cove there wot was very thin, and very anxious-looking. Said 'e wouldn't insult 'is intelligence by believin' the things wot preachers said, so I put a question to 'im."

"What did you say?" enquired Mrs. Bindle.

"I asks 'im if 'e was quite sure 'e 'ad any intelligence to insult, an' that made 'em laugh."

Mrs. Bindle nodded her head in approval.

Bindle regarded her in wide-eyed amazement. Never before in the whole of his experience had he known her approve word or action of his.

"Did he say anything else?" queried Mrs. Bindle.

"No; 'e soon got down, an' another cove got up. Then they started a Christian meeting next door, and there was them two lots of people shouting all sorts of

things at each other. Wot Gawd must 'ave thought of it all does me. Why can't they stay at home and pray if they feel as bad as all that. A day a month at 'ome to blow orf, instead of goin' into Regent's Park, a-kicking up a row so as you can't 'ear the birds sing, makes you feel ashamed o' bein' a man, it does. One chap got up and said he was goin' to prove there wasn't no Gawd."

"And what did he say?" asked Mrs. Bindle with interest.

"All 'e could say was, that 'im and 'is friends 'ad searched everywhere through wot they called the whole physical world, an' they 'adn't found 'Im, therefore there wasn't no Gawd."

"They didn't ought to allow it," commented Mrs. Bindle indignantly.

"Then another cove got up and said 'e 'oped that 'is friend, wot 'ad just got down, 'ad proved to the whole Park that there wasn't no Gawd, and if there was any thinkin' different would they 'old up their 'ands."

"Did anybody hold up their hands?" asked Mrs. Bindle.

"Yes, up went my little 'and like a whiz-bang," announced Bindle.

Mrs. Bindle gave Bindle a look that she usually reserved for Mr. Hearty.

"'Well, sir!' says 'e, lookin' at me, 'wot is your question?'

"'Well,' says I, 'will you and your pals come round with me to-morrow morning an' try and enlist?' There was a rare lot of khaki boys round there, and didn't they raise a yell. That was the end of that meeting. Every time anyone tried to get up an' speak, them khaki boys started a-'ootin' and a-callin' out, and 'avin' of a rare ole time. There was one cove wot made us laugh fit to die. Every time one o' the atheists started talkin', 'e said in a 'igh-pitched voice, 'Oh, Cuthbert, don't!' as if it was a gal wot was being squeezed."

Mrs. Bindle had listened to Bindle with the nearest approach to approval that she had ever shown.

"There was another cove there," continued Bindle, warming to his subject. "Funny little feller 'e was too, all cap an' overcoat, talking about the Judgment Day. Awful things 'e promised us, 'e did. Made out as if Gawd was worse than an 'Un. 'E said 'e'd be standin' beside Gawd when all the people was judged, and 'e'd tell 'Im 'ow 'e'd been in Regent's Park a-warnin' people wot was goin' to 'appen,

and no one wouldn't take no notice. Then we was all goin' to be sent into a sort of mixed-grill and burnt for ever. Nice comforting little cove 'e was; pleasant to live with," added Bindle drily.

"Why religion can't make you 'appy without you a-tryin' to make other people un'appy is wot does me. When I got a good cigar I don't go waving it in the face of every cove I meets, saying, 'Ah! you ain't got a cigar like this, you only got a woodbine.' Don't seem good-natured, it don't."

"We've got to save souls," remarked Mrs. Bindle with grim decision.

"But didn't a man ought to be good because he wants to be good, and not because 'e's afraid of being bad?" demanded Bindle.

Mrs. Bindle pondered over this remark for a moment; but finding it too deep for her replied, "You always was a doubter, Bindle; I'd have been a happier woman if you hadn't been."

"But," continued Bindle, "do you think Gawd wants to 'ave a man in chapel wot wants to be at the Empire, only doesn't go because 'e's afraid? I wouldn't if I was Gawd," he added, shaking his head with decision. "Look at 'Earty's 'orse on Saturday nights. Can't 'ardly drag itself to the stables, it can't, yet 'Earty's as sure of 'eaven as I am of you, Mrs. B."

Mrs. Bindle was silent, her manner was distraite, she was listening for the sound of Mr. Gupperduck's return.

"I'd give my sugar ration to know wot we're all a-goin' to do in 'eaven," remarked Bindle meditatively. "Fancy 'Earty there! Wot will 'e do? They won't let 'im sell vegetables, and they'll soon stop 'im singing."

"We shall all have our occupations," remarked Mrs. Bindle oracularly.

"Yes, but wot?" demanded Bindle. "There ain't no furniture to move an' no vegetables to sell. All I can do is to watch 'Earty, an' see 'e don't go round pinchin' angels' meat-tickets."

For once Mrs. Bindle allowed a remark to pass without the inevitable accusation of blasphemy!

"No," remarked Bindle, "if I dies an' they sends me up to 'eaven, I shall knock at the door, an' I shall say, 'Is 'Earty 'ere? 'Earty the Fulham and Putney

greengrocer, you know.' If they says 'Yes,' then it's a smoker for me;" and Bindle proceeded to re-charge his pipe. "I often thought——"

Bindle was interrupted by a loud knocking at the outer door. With a swift movement Mrs. Bindle rose and passed out of the kitchen. Bindle listened. There was a sound of men's voices in the outer passage, with the short, sharper tones of Mrs. Bindle. A moment later the door opened, and two men entered supporting the limp form of Mr. Gupperduck.

"'Oly angels!" cried Bindle, starting up. "'Oly angels! someone's been a-tryin' to alter 'im." He bent forward to get a better view. "Done it pretty well, too," he muttered as he gazed at the unprepossessing features of Mr. Gupperduck, now accentuated by a black eye, a broken lip, a contusion on the right cheek-bone, and one ear covered with blood. His collar had disappeared, also his hat and spectacles, his waist-coat was torn open, and various portions were missing from his coat.

"Wot's 'e been doin'?" enquired Bindle of a weedy-looking man with long hair, a sandy pointed beard, and a cloth cap, three sizes too large for him, which rested on the tops of his ears. "Wot's 'e been up to?"

"He's been addressing a meeting," replied the man in a mournful voice.

Bindle turned once more to Mr. Gupperduck and examined him closely.

"Looks as if the meetin's been addressin' 'im, don't it?" he remarked.

"It was not a very successful meeting," remarked the other supporter of Mr. Gupperduck, a very little man with a very long beard. "It wasn't a very successful meeting," he repeated with conviction.

"Well, I never seen a meetin' make such alterations in a man in all my puff," remarked Bindle.

Mrs. Bindle had busied herself in preparing a basin of hot water with which to wash the mud and blood from the victim's pallid face. With closed eyes Mr. Gupperduck continued to breathe heavily.

Bindle with practical samaritanism went into the parlour and returned with a half-quartern bottle. Pouring some of the contents into a glass he held it to Mr. Gupperduck's lips. Without the least resistance the liquid was swallowed.

"Took that down pretty clean," said Bindle, looking up at the man with the sandy beard.

"Don't do that!" cried Mrs. Bindle, turning suddenly, her nostrils detecting the smell of alcohol.

"Do what?" enquired Bindle from where he knelt beside the damaged Mr. Gupperduck.

"Give him that," said Mrs. Bindle, "he's temperance."

"Well, 'e ain't now," remarked Bindle with calm conviction.

"Oh, you villain!" The vindictiveness of Mrs. Bindle's tone caused the three listeners to look up, and even Mr. Gupperduck's eyelids, after a preliminary flutter, raised themselves, as he gazed about him wonderingly.

"Where am I?" he moaned.

"You're all right," said Mrs. Bindle, taking Bindle's place by Mr. Gupperduck's side. "You're safe now."

Mr. Gupperduck closed his eyes again, and Mrs. Bindle proceeded to wipe his face with a piece of flannel dipped in water.

"Pore ole Guppy!" murmured Bindle. "They done it in style any'ow. I wonder wot 'e's been up to. Must 'ave been sayin' things wot they didn't like. Wot was 'e talkin' about, ole sport?"

Bindle turned to the man with the sandy beard, who was sitting on a chair leaning forward with one hand on each knee, much as if he were watching a cock-fight.

"It was a Peace meeting," replied the man mournfully.

Bindle gave vent to a prolonged whistle of understanding.

"Oh, Guppy, Guppy!" he cried. "Why couldn't you 'ave kept to the next world, without getting mixed up with this?"

"It was wounded soldiers," volunteered the man with the sandy beard.

"Wounded soldiers!" exclaimed Bindle.

"Yes," continued the man mournfully; "he appealed to them, as sufferers under this terrible armageddon, to pass a resolution condemning the continuance of the war, and—and——"

"They passed their resolution on 'is face," suggested Bindle.

The man nodded. "It was terrible," he said, "terrible; we were afraid they would kill him."

"And where was you while all this was 'appenin'?"

"Oh!" said the man, "I was fortunate enough to find a tree."

Bindle looked him up and down with elaborate intentness, then having satisfied himself as to every detail of his appearance and apparel, he remarked:

"Ain't it wonderful wot luck some coves do 'ave!"

"I regard it as the direct interposition of Providence," said the man.

"And I suppose you shinned up that tree like giddy-o?" suggested Bindle.

"Yes," said the man, "I was brought up in the country."

"Was you now?" said Bindle. "Well, it was lucky for you, wasn't it?"

"The hand of God," was the reply; "clearly the hand of God."

"Sort o' boosted you up the tree from behind, so as when they'd all gone you could come down and pick up wot was left of 'im. That it?" enquired Bindle.

"That is exactly what happened, my friend," replied the man with the sandy beard.

"An' where did all this 'appen?" asked Bindle.

"It took place in Hyde Park," replied the man. "A very rough meeting, an extremely rough meeting, and he was speaking so well, so convincingly," he added.

Bindle looked at the man curiously to see if he were really serious; but there was no vestige of a smile upon his face.

"It's wonderful wot a man can do with a crowd," remarked Bindle oracularly; "but," turning to the inert figure of Mr. Gupperduck, "it's still more wonderful

wot a crowd can do with a man."

"Bindle!" Mrs. Bindle's voice rang out authoritatively.

"'Ere am I," replied Bindle obediently.

"Help us lift Mr. Gupperduck on a chair."

With elaborate care they raised the inert form of Mr. Gupperduck on to a chair. His arms fell down limply beside him. Once he opened his eyes, and looked round the room, then, sighing as if in thankfulness at being amongst friends, he closed them again.

"'The Lord hath given me rest from mine enemies,'" he quoted.

Mrs. Bindle and the two friends regarded Mr. Gupperduck admiringly.

Seeing that their friend and brother was now in safe hands, Mr. Gupperduck's two supporters prepared to withdraw. Mrs. Bindle pressed them to have something to eat; but this they refused.

"Now ain't women funny," muttered Bindle, as Mrs. Bindle left the room to show her visitors to the door. "She was jest complaining that she could only get two candles and a quarter of a pound of marjarine, and yet she wants them two coves to stay to supper, 'ungry-lookin' pair they was too. I s'pose it's wot she calls 'ospitality," he added; "seems to me damn silly."

Like a hen fussing over a damaged chick, Mrs. Bindle ministered to the requirements of Mr. Gupperduck. She fed him with a spoon, crooned over and sympathised with him in his misfortune, whilst in her heart there was a great anger against those who had raised their hands against so godly a man.

When he had eventually been half-led, half-carried upstairs by Bindle, and Bindle himself had returned to the kitchen, Mrs. Bindle expressed her unambiguous opinion of a country that permitted such an outrage. She likened Mr. Gupperduck to those in the Scriptures who had been stoned by the multitude. She indicated that in the next world there would be a terrible retribution upon those who were responsible for the assault upon Mr. Gupperduck. She attacked the Coalition Government for not providing a more effective police force.

"But," protested Bindle at length, "'e was askin' for it. Why can't 'e keep 'is

opinions to 'imself, and not go a-shovin' 'em down other people's throats when they don't like the taste of 'em? If you go tryin' to shove tripe down the throat of a cove wot don't like tripe, you're sure to get one in the eye, that is if 'e's bigger'n wot you are; if 'e's smaller 'e'll jest be sick. Yet 'ere are you a-complainin' because Guppy gets 'imself 'urt. I don't understand——"

"Because you haven't got a soul," interrupted Mrs. Bindle with conviction.

"Well," remarked Bindle philosophically, "I'd sooner 'ave a flea than a soul, there is flea-powder but there ain't no soul-powder wot I've been able to find."

And Bindle rose, yawned and made towards the door.

CHAPTER VII

THE COURTING OF THE REV. ANDREW MACFIE

Mr. Hearty had never reconciled himself to the understanding that existed between his daughter Millie and Charlie Dixon. He resented Bindle's share in the romance, still more he resented the spirit of independence that it had developed in Millie. He had, however, been forced to bow to the storm. Everyone was against him, and Millie herself had left home, refusing to return until he had apologised to her for the most unseemly suggestion he had made as to her relations with Charlie Dixon.

Sergeant Charles Dixon, of the 110th Service Battalion, London Regiment, had gone to the front, and Millie, sad-eyed, but grave, looked forward to the time when he would return, a V.C.

"Well, Millikins!" Bindle would cry, "'ow's 'is Nibs?" and Millie would blush and tell of the latest news she had received from her lover.

"Uncle Joe," she would say, "I couldn't stand it but for you," and there would be that in her voice which would cause Bindle to turn his head aside and admonish himself as "an ole fool."

"It's all right, Millikins," Bindle would say, "Charlie's goin' to win the war, an' we're all goin' to be proud of 'im," and Millie would smile at her uncle with moist eyes, and give that affectionate squeeze to his arm that Bindle would not have parted with for the rubies of Ind.

"You know, Uncle Joe," she said bravely on one occasion, "we women have to give up those we love."

Bindle had not seen the plaintive humour of her remark; but had suddenly become noisily engrossed in the use of his handkerchief.

Mr. Hearty was almost cordial to Charlie Dixon on the eve of his going to France. Once this young man could be removed from Millie's path, the way would be clear for a match such as he had in mind. He did not know exactly what sort of man he desired for his daughter; but he was very definite as to the

position in the world that his future son-in-law must occupy. He would have preferred someone who had made his mark. Men of more mature years, he had noticed, were frequently favourably disposed towards young girls as wives, and Mr. Hearty was determined that he would be proud of his son-in-law, that is to say, his son-in-law was to be a man of whom anyone might feel proud.

It would not behove a Christian such as Mr. Hearty to wish a fellow-being dead; but he could not disguise from himself the fact that our casualties on the Western Front were heavy, particularly during the period of offensives. Since the occasion when Millie had asserted her independence, and had declined to order her affections in accordance with Mr. Hearty's wishes, there had been something of an armed neutrality existing between father and daughter. In this she had been supported, not only by Bindle and Mrs. Hearty, but, by a strange freak of fate, to a certain extent, by Mrs. Bindle herself.

Mr. Hearty had never quite understood how it was that his sister-in-law had turned against him. She had said nothing whatever as to where her sympathies lay; but Mr. Hearty instinctively felt that she had ranged herself on the side of the enemy.

But the fates were playing for Mr. Hearty.

When the Rev. Mr. Sopley, of the Alton Road Chapel, had decided to retire on account of failing health, Lady Knob-Kerrick determined to bring up from Barton Bridge, her country residence, the Rev. Andrew MacFie. She had forgiven him his participation in the Temperance Fête fiasco, accepting his explanation that he had been drugged by the disciples of the devil, a view that would have been entirely endorsed by Mrs. Bindle, had she known that Bindle was responsible for the mixing of alcohol with the lemonade.

The Barton Bridge Temperance Fête fiasco had proved the greatest sensation that the county had ever known. The mixing of crude alcohol and distilled mead with the lemonade, whereby the participants in the rustic fête had been intoxicated, thus causing it to develop into a wild orgy of violence, resulting in assaults upon Lady Knob-Kerrick and the police, had been a nine days' wonder. A number of arrests had been made; but when the true facts came to the knowledge of the police, the prisoners had been quietly released, and officially nothing more was heard of the affair.

It was a long time before Lady Knob-Kerrick could be persuaded to see in the Rev. Andrew MacFie, the minister of her chapel, an innocent victim of a deep-

laid plot. It was he who had seized the hose that washed her out of her carriage, it was he who had led the assault on the police, it was he who had said things that had been the common talk of all the public-house bars for miles round.

After Mr. MacFie's eloquent sermon upon the Gadarene swine, Lady Knob-Kerrick had eventually come round, and a peace had been patched up between them. From that day it required more courage to whisper the words "Temperance Fête" in Barton Bridge, than to charge across "No Man's Land" in France.

And so it was that the Rev. Andrew MacFie transferred his activities from Barton Bridge to Fulham. He was grateful to Providence for this sign of beneficent approval of his labours, and relieved to know that Barton Bridge would in the future be but a memory. There he had made history, for in the bars of The Two-Faced Earl and The Blue Fox the unbeliever drinks with gusto and a wink of superior knowledge a beverage known as a "lemon-and-a-mac," a compound of lemonade and gin, which owes its origin to the part played in the historic temperance fête by the Rev. Andrew MacFie.

One evening, shortly after the departure of Charlie Dixon, Mrs. Bindle was busily engaged in laying the table for supper. Mrs. Bindle's kitchen was a model of what a kitchen should be. Everything was clean, orderly, neat. The utensils over the mantelpiece shone like miniature moons, the oil-cloth was spotless, the dresser scrubbed to a whiteness almost incredible in London, the saucepans almost as clean outside as in, the rug before the stove neatly pinned down at the corners. It was obviously the kitchen of a woman to whom cleanliness and order were fetiches. As Bindle had once remarked, "There's only one spot in my missis' kitchen, and that's when I'm there."

As she proceeded with her work she hummed her favourite hymn; it rose and fell, sometimes dying away altogether. She banged the various articles on the table as if to emphasise her thoughts. Her task completed, she went to the sink. As she was washing her hands there was a knock at the kitchen door. Taking no notice she proceeded to dry her hands. The knock was repeated.

"Oh, don't stand there playing the fool, Bindle!" she snapped. "I haven't time to ____"

The door opened slowly and admitted the tall, lanky form of the Rev. Andrew MacFie.

"It's me, Mrs. Beendle," he said, as he entered the room. "The outer door was

open, so I joost cam in."

"Oh! I'm sorry, sir," said Mrs. Bindle, "I thought it was Bindle."

Her whole manner underwent a change; her uncompromising attitude of disapproval giving place to one of almost servile anxiety to make a good impression. She hurriedly removed and folded her apron, slipping it into the dresser-drawer.

"Won't you come into the parlour, sir?" she said. "It's very kind of you to call."

"Na, na, Mrs. Beendle," replied Mr. MacFie. "I joost cam in to—to——" He hesitated.

"But won't you sit down, sir?" Mrs. Bindle indicated a chair by the side of the table.

Mr. MacFie drew the chair towards him, sitting bolt upright, holding his soft felt hat upon his knees.

Mrs. Bindle drew another chair from under the opposite side of the table and seated herself primly upon it. With folded hands she waited for the minister to speak.

Mr. MacFie was obviously ill at ease.

"Ye'll be comin' to the sairvice, the nicht, Mrs. Beendle?" he began.

"Oh, yes, sir," responded Mrs. Bindle, moving her head back on her shoulders, depressing her chin and drawing in her lips with a simper. "I wouldn't miss your address."

"Aye!" said Mr. MacFie, gazing into vacancy as if in search of inspiration. Finding none, he repeated "Aye!"

Mr. MacFie's expression was one of persistent gloom. No smile was ever permitted to wanton across his sandy features. After a few moments' silence he made another effort.

"I'm sair consairned, Mrs. Beendle——" He stopped, wordless.

"Yes, sir," responded Mrs. Bindle encouragingly.

"I'm sair consairned no to see the wee lassie more at the kirk."

"Who, sir, Millie?" queried Mrs. Bindle in surprise.

"Aye!" responded Mr. MacFie. "The call of mammon is like the blairst of a great trumpet, and to the unbelieving it is as sweet music. It is the call of Satan, Mrs. Beendle, the call of Satan," he repeated, as if pleased with the phrase. "I'd na like the wee lassie to—to——"

"I'll speak to Mr. Hearty, sir," said Mrs. Bindle, compressing her lips. "It's very good of you, sir, I'm sure, to——"

"Na, na," interrupted Mr. MacFie hastily, "na, na, Mrs. Beendle, ma duty. It is the blessed duty of the shepherd to be consairned for the welfare——"

He stopped suddenly. The outer door had banged, and there was the sound of steps coming along the passage. Bindle's voice was heard singing cheerily, "I'd rather Kiss the Mistress than the Maid." He opened the door and stopped singing suddenly. For a moment he stood looking at the pair with keen enjoyment. Both Mrs. Bindle and Mr. MacFie appeared self-conscious, as they gazed obliquely at the interrupter.

"'Ullo, caught you," said Bindle jocosely.

"Bindle!" There was horror and anger in Mrs. Bindle's voice. Mr. MacFie merely looked uncomfortable. He rose hastily.

"I must be gaeing, Mrs. Beendle," he said; then turning to Bindle remarked, "I joost cam to enquire if Mrs. Beendle was coming to chapel the nicht."

"Don't you fret about that, sir," said Bindle genially. "She wouldn't miss a chance to pray."

"And—and may we expect you, Mr. Beendle?" enquired Mr. MacFie by way of making conversation and preventing an embarrassing silence.

"I ain't much on religion, sir," replied Bindle hastily. "Mrs. B.'s the one for that. Lemonade and religion are things, sir, wot I can be trusted with. I don't touch neither." Then, as Mr. MacFie moved towards the door, he added, "Must you go, sir? You won't stay an' 'ave a bit o' supper?"

"Na, na!" replied Mr. MacFie hastily, "I hae the Lord's work to do, Mr. Beendle, the Lord's work to do," he repeated as he shook hands with Mrs. Bindle and then with Bindle. "The Lord's work to do," he repeated for a third time as, followed

by Mrs. Bindle, he left the room.

"Funny thing that the Lord's work should make 'im look like that," remarked Bindle meditatively, as he drew a tin of salmon from his pocket.

When Mrs. Bindle returned to the kitchen it was obvious that she was seriously displeased. The bangs that punctuated the process of "dishing-up" were good fortissimo bangs.

Bindle continued to read his paper imperturbably. In his nostrils was the scent of a favourite stew. He lifted his head like a hound, appreciatively sniffing the air, a look of contentment overspreading his features.

Having poured out the contents of the saucepan, Mrs. Bindle went to the sink and filled the vessel with water. Carrying it across the kitchen, she banged it down on the stove. Opening the front, and picking up the poker, she gave the fire several unnecessary jabs.

"Wot did Sandy want?" enquired Bindle as he got to work upon his supper.

"Don't talk to me," snapped Mrs. Bindle. "You'd try a saint, you would, insulting the minister in that way."

"Insultin'! Me!" cried Bindle in surprise. "Why, I only cheer-o'd 'im."

"You'll never learn 'ow to behave," stormed Mrs. Bindle, losing her temper and her aitches. "Look at you now, all dressed up and leaving me alone."

Bindle was wearing his best clothes, for some reason known only to himself.

"Anyone would think you was goin' to a weddin'," continued Mrs. Bindle.

"Not again," said Bindle cheerfully. "Wot was ole Scotch-an'-Soda after?" he enquired.

"When you ask me a proper question, I'll give you a proper answer," announced Mrs. Bindle.

"Oh, Lord!" said Bindle with mock resignation. "Well, wot did the Reverend MacAndrew want?"

"He came to enquire why Millie was so often absent from chapel. I shall have to speak to Mr. Hearty," said Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle's reply was a prolonged whistle. "'E's after Millikins, is 'e?" he muttered.

That is how both Bindle and Mrs. Bindle first learned that the Rev. Andrew MacFie was interested in their pretty niece, Millie Hearty.

Mrs. Bindle mentioned the fact of Mr. MacFie's call to Mr. Hearty, and from that moment he had seen in the minister a potential son-in-law.

The angular piety of Mr. MacFie rendered him an awkward, not to say a clumsy, lover.

"I likes to see ole Mac a-'angin' round Millikins," remarked Bindle to Mrs. Bindle one evening over supper. "It's like an 'ippopotamus a-givin' the glad-eye to a canary."

"Heathen!" was Mrs. Bindle's sole comment.

Millie Hearty herself had been much troubled by Mr. MacFie's ponderous attentions. At first she had regarded them merely as the friendly interest of a pastor in a member of his flock; but soon they became too obvious for misinterpretation.

"Millikins!" said Bindle one evening, as he and Millie were walking home from the pictures, "you ain't a-goin' to forget Charlie, are you?"

"Uncle Joe!" There was reproach in Millie's voice as she withdrew her arm from Bindle's.

"All right, Millikins," said Bindle, capturing her hand and placing it through his arm, "don't get 'uffy. Ole Mac's been makin' such a dead set at you, that I wanted to know 'ow things stood."

Bindle's remarks had opened the flood-gates of Millie's confidence. She told him that she had not liked to speak of it before because nothing had been said, although there had been some very obvious hints from Mr. Hearty.

"I *hate* him, Uncle Joe. He's always—always——" She paused, blushing.

"A-givin' of you the glad-eye," suggested Bindle. "I seen 'im."

"Oh, he's horrible, Uncle Joe. I'm sure he's a wicked man."

"'Course 'e is," replied Bindle with conviction, "or 'e wouldn't be a parson."

Bindle had spoken to Mr. Hearty about the matter. "Look 'ere, 'Earty, you ain't goin' back on them two love-birds, are you?" he enquired.

Mr. Hearty had regarded his brother-in-law with what he conceived to be reproving dignity.

"I do not understand, Joseph," he remarked in hollow, woolly tones.

"Well, there's ole Mac, always a-givin' the glad-eye to Millikins," explained Bindle.

"If you wish to speak of our minister, Joseph, you must do so respectfully, and I cannot listen to such vulgar suggestions."

"Oh, come orf of it, 'Earty! you're only a greengrocer, an' greengrocers don't talk like that 'ere, whatever they may do in 'eaven. If you're a-goin' to 'ave any 'anky-panky with Millikins over that sandy-'aired son of a tub-thumper, then you're up against the biggest thing in your life, an' don't you forget it."

Bindle was angry.

"Of late, Joseph," Mr. Hearty replied, "you have shown too much desire to interfere in my private affairs, and I cannot permit it."

"Oh! you can't, can't you?" said Bindle. "Don't you forget, ole sport, that if it 'adn't a-been for me 'oldin' my tongue, you wouldn't 'ave 'ad no bloomin' affairs for me to mix up in."

Mr. Hearty paled and fumbled with the right lapel of his coat.

"Any'ow," said Bindle, "Millikins is goin' to marry Charlie Dixon, an' if you're goin' to try any of your dirty tricks over Ole Skin-and-Oatmeal, then you're goin' to be up against J.B. There are times," muttered Bindle, as he walked away from the Heartys' house, "when 'Earty gets my goat"; and he started whistling shrilly to cheer himself up.

Bindle was still troubled in his mind about Mr. Hearty's scheme for Millie's future and, one Sunday evening, he determined to forgo the Night Club, in order to call upon the Heartys with the object of conveying to Mr. MacFie in the course of conversation that Millie was irrevocably pledged to Charlie Dixon.

Mr. MacFie had formed the habit of supping with the Heartys after evening service, and frequently Mrs. Bindle was of the party.

Bindle's Sunday evening engagements at the Night Club had been a cause of great relief to Mrs. Bindle. For some time previously Mr. Hearty's invitations to the Bindles to take supper on Sunday evenings had been growing less and less frequent. It did not require a very great effort of the imagination to discover the cause. Bindle's racy speech and unconventional views upon religion were to Mr. Hearty anathema, and whilst they amused Mrs. Hearty, who, having trouble with her breath, did not seem to consider that religion was meant for her, they caused Mr. Hearty intense anguish. He felt safe, however, in asking Mr. MacFie to supper on Sundays because Mrs. Bindle had confided to him that Bindle was always engaged upon the Sabbath night. She did not mention the nature of the engagement.

When Bindle entered the drawing-room, Mr. Hearty, Mr. MacFie, Mr. Gupperduck and Mrs. Bindle were gathered round the harmonium. Mrs. Hearty sat in her customary place upon the sofa waiting for someone to address her that she might confide in them upon the all-absorbing subject of her breath.

Mr. Gupperduck was seated on a chair, endeavouring to discipline his accordion into not sounding E sharp continuously through each hymn. The others were awaiting with keen interest the outcome of the struggle.

"Got a pain, ain't it?" enquired Bindle, having greeted everybody, as he stood puffing volumes of smoke from one of "Sprague's Fulham Whiffs," a "smoke" he still affected when Lord Windover was not present to correct his taste in tobacco.

"Well, wot's the joke?" he went on, looking from the lugubrious countenance of Mr. MacFie to the melancholy foreboding depicted on that of Mr. Hearty.

Turning to Mrs. Hearty, Bindle pointed his cigar at her accusingly. "You been tellin' naughty stories, Martha," he said, "I can see it. Look at them coves over there"; he turned his cigar towards Mr. Gupperduck and Mr. MacFie. "Oh, Martha, Martha!" and he wagged his head solemnly at Mrs. Hearty, who was already in a state of helpless laughter, "ain't you jest the limit, and 'im a parson, too."

Millie Hearty entered the room at this moment and ran up to her uncle, greeting him affectionately.

"Oh, Uncle Joe, I'm so glad you've come," she cried. "You never come to see us now."

"Well, well, Millikins, it can't be 'elped. It's the war, you know. That cove Llewellyn John is always wantin' me round to give 'im advice. Then I 'ave to run over an' give Haig an 'int or two. Ain't the Kayser jest mad when 'e 'ears I been over, because it means another push. Why, would you believe it, sir," he turned to Mr. MacFie, "the reason they didn't make ole 'Indenburg a prince last birthday was because 'e 'adn't been able to land me.

"'Get me Joe Bindle, dead or alive,' said the Kayser to 'Indy, 'an' I'll make you a prince,' an' ain't old 'Indenburg ratty." Bindle nodded his head knowingly.

Millie laughed. "You mustn't tell such wicked fibs on Sunday, Uncle Joe," she cried. "It's very naughty of you."

Bindle pulled her down upon his knee and kissed her. "You ain't goin' agin your ole uncle, are you, Millikins?" he cried; then suddenly turning to Mr. Hearty he enquired, "Ain't we goin' to 'ave any 'ymns, 'Earty? 'Ere, I say, can't you stop Wheezy Willie doin' that, ole sport?" this to Mr. Gupperduck who was still struggling to silence the mutinous E sharp; "sets my teeth on edge, it does. I'm in rare voice to-night, bought some acid drops, I did, as I come along, an' 'ad two raw eggs in the private bar of The Yellow Ostrich."

Bindle ran up a dubious scale to prove his words.

"Oh! do be quiet, Uncle Joe," laughed Millie. "You'll frighten Mr. MacFie away."

Bindle turned and regarded the solemn visage of Mr. MacFie; his long immobile upper lip; his sandy hair, parted in the middle and brushed smoothly down upon his head.

"No, Millikins," he said with conviction, "there ain't nothink wot'll frighten a Scotchman out of England. They know wot's wot, they do. Ain't that so, sir?" he enquired of Mr. MacFie.

Mr. MacFie regarded Bindle as if he were talking in a foreign tongue.

Mr. Gupperduck laid his accordion on a chair, giving up the unequal struggle. The others, taking this as a signal that music was over for the evening, seated themselves in various parts of the room.

"I'm glad you're 'ere, sir," said Bindle to Mr. MacFie. "I wanted your advice on somethink in the Bible. Now then, Millikins, you got to sit down beside me. Can't sit on your uncle's knee when we're talkin' about the Bible. Wot'll Charlie

say?" Then turning to Mr. MacFie with what he imagined to be great subtlety and tact, Bindle enquired, "You ain't met Charlie Dixon, 'ave you, sir?"

Mr. MacFie shook a mournful head in negation.

"'E's goin' to marry Millikins, ain't 'e, Millikins?"

Millie cast her eyes down and, with heightened colour, bowed her head in affirmation of Bindle's statement.

"Pretty pair they'll make too," said Bindle with conviction. "I 'ope you'll be marryin' 'em, sir."

Mr. MacFie looked uncomfortable.

"But that ain't wot I wanted to talk to you about," continued Bindle. "I 'appened to pick up the Bible to-day,"—Mrs. Bindle looked sharply at him,—"and it sort of opened at a place where there was a yarn about war, so I read it.

"It was about a cove called Urrier an' a king named David."

"Uriah the Hittite," murmured Mr. Hearty.

"Urrier 'ad got a smart bird,—that's a gal, sir," Bindle explained to Mr. MacFie, —"and David 'ad sort o' taken a likin' to 'er, so wot does David do but send Urrier to the front, so as 'e might get killed, an' then David pinches 'is gal.

"Now wot I want to know, sir," said Bindle, addressing Mr. MacFie, "is wot Gawd did? 'Cos as far as I can see 'E was sort o' fond o' David. Now if I'd been Gawd, an' David 'ad done a thing like that, I'd 'a raised a pretty big blister on 'is nose."

No one spoke. Mr. Hearty glanced covertly at Mr. MacFie, who looked as if he would have given much to be elsewhere. Mrs. Bindle's lips had entirely disappeared. Mrs. Hearty gasped and heaved, whilst Minnie blushed.

"Bindle!" cried Mrs. Bindle at last; "Bindle, you forget yourself."

"Not me, Mrs. B., I come 'ere to get wot you an' 'Earty calls 'light.' Now, sir," turning to Mr. MacFie, "wot do you think Gawd did, an' wot do you think o' that blighter David?"

"Meester Beendle," said Mr. MacFie at last, "we must leave to Proveedence the things that belong to Proveedence."

"I thought you'd agree, sir; you're a sport, you are. Of course David ought to 'ave left to Urrier wot belonged to Urrier, and not pinch 'is gal. You wouldn't do a thing like that, sir, would you?" he enquired. "I wonder wot the gal thought, eh, Millikins?" he enquired, turning to his niece.

"If I had been her," said Millie, "I should have killed David."

"Millie!" gasped Mr. Hearty. "How—how dare you say such a thing."

"I should, father," replied Millie quietly.

Mr. MacFie coughed, Mr. Hearty looked about him as if for something at which to clutch, then with sudden inspiration he said, "Millie, we will have a hymn."

"'Ere, let me get out," cried Bindle in mock alarm. "I can't stand Wheezy Willie again, too much of one note. Good night, Martha. My, ain't you gettin' fat," he remarked as he stood looking down at Mrs. Hearty, whereat she went off into wheezes and heavings of laughter. "S'long, 'Earty, I 'ope the allotments won't ruin you," and Bindle took his departure.

Millie went down to the door to see him out. "Uncle Joe," she whispered, as she bade him good night, "I understood."

"Oh, you did, did you?" said Bindle. "Ain't we getting a wise little puss, Millikins," and Bindle walked home whistling "The Long, Long Trail."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHAPEL CONVERSAZIONE

Lady Knob-Kerrick's nomination of the Rev. Andrew MacFie to the vacant pastorate at the Alton Road Chapel was her way of showing that an amnesty had been arranged between them, and Mr. MacFie had accepted it with the nearest approach to pleasure that he ever permitted himself. Miss MacFie, his sister and housekeeper, had sniffed; but it was always difficult to discriminate between Miss MacFie's physical and mental sniffs. During the winter she seemed to suffer from a perpetual cold in the head. It sometimes attacked her in the spring and autumn, so that only during the months of June, July and August could one say with any degree of certainty that Miss MacFie's sniffs meant indignation and not an inflamed membrane.

In commemoration of his long ministry at the Alton Road Chapel, the Rev. Mr. Sopley was to receive an illuminated address, a purse of fifty pounds and a silver-mounted hot-water bottle. For reasons of economy the presentation was to be made on the same occasion as the conversazione inaugurating the pastorate of Mr. MacFie. This conversazione had been delayed for some months, as Miss MacFie had been forced to remain behind at Barton Bridge in order to recover from a particularly severe chill, and also to arrange for the letting of the house.

In the meantime Mr. MacFie had taken lodgings in Fulham, thus freeing Mr. Sopley, whose health for some time past had not been good. It had been arranged, however, that the retiring shepherd should be present at the celebration in order to receive the address, the purse and the silver-mounted hot-water bottle.

Lady Knob-Kerrick had consented herself to make the presentation, and a glee-party had been arranged for to entertain the guests. It had first been suggested that the services should be engaged of a man who produced rabbits out of top-hats, and omelettes from ladies' shoes; but it had been decided that such things were too secular for the occasion.

Lady Knob-Kerrick had insisted that the words of the glees should first be submitted to her, and a lengthy correspondence had taken place between her and the leader of the glee-party. The first list had been vetoed in its entirety. One

item, entitled "Oh! Hush Thee My Baby," was considered by Lady Knob-Kerrick as not quite nice; it might make the young girls feel self-conscious. Another one of a slightly humorous nature referred to a man's "bleeding nose." Lady Knob-Kerrick had written to the leader of the glee-party in uncompromising terms upon the indelicacy of submitting to her so coarse a composition. After a brisk interchange of letters, a programme was eventually decided upon.

The conversazione was held in the Chapel school-room. A considerable portion of Mr. Hearty's drawing-room furniture had been requisitioned in order to give to the place an appearance of "homeiness" and comfort. Mr. Hearty's clock and lustres were upon the mantelpiece, and Mr. Hearty's pink candles were in the lustres. Chains of coloured paper, to Mr. Hearty the extreme evidences of festivity, stretched from the corners of the room to the central gas bracket on which had been placed opaque pink globes.

Nothing, however, could mitigate the hardness of the scriptural texts in oak Oxford frames that garnished the walls. "Prepare to Meet Thy God," even when in gold letters entwined with apple-blossom, seemed scarcely the greeting for those who had been invited to revel. "The Wages of Sin is Death," with violets coquetting in and out the letters, is sound theology; but not a convincing invitation to merry-making. "And So Shall Ye All Likewise Perish," with primroses that seemed to have paled through long association with so terrible a menace, threw out its uncompromising warning from immediately above the refreshment-table. On the table itself was everything that a little money could buy, from fish-paste sandwiches to home-made three-cornered tarts, with raspberry-jam baked hard peeping out at the joins, as if to advertise that there was no deception.

Millie Hearty had striven to mitigate the uncompromising gloom of the texts by placing evergreens above the frames; but with no very pronounced success.

Mr. Hearty had supplied the fruit and Mr. Black the groceries at "cost-price." That is to say, Mr. Hearty had taken off a halfpenny a pound from his tenpenny apples, and Mr. Black three farthings a bottle from his one and ninepenny lemon-squash.

On the night of the conversazione, Mr. Hearty and Mrs. Bindle arrived early in order to put finishing touches to everything. Mrs. Bindle was wearing a new dress of puce-coloured merino, and Mr. Hearty had donned a white tie in honour of the occasion. His trousers still concertinaed mournfully down his legs until

they despairedly met his large and shapeless boots.

Millie Hearty was also an early arrival. In her white frock she looked strangely out of place associated with her father and aunt.

Mr. Hearty fidgeted about from place to place in a state of acute nervousness. His eyes, roving round in search of some defect in the arrangements, fixed themselves upon the gas. Fetching a chair he mounted it and lowered in turn each burner, then, replacing the chair against the wall, he stepped some distance back to see the effect. The result was that he once more mounted the chair and readjusted the flames to the same height as before.

Mrs. Bindle also moved about, but always with a set purpose, putting finishing touches to everything. Alice, the Heartys' maid, seemed to be engaged in a game of in and out, banging the door at each entry and exit. In spite of the frequency with which this was done, it caused Mr. Hearty each time to look round expectantly.

"Is Joseph coming?" he enquired of Mrs. Bindle.

"Yes," she replied, "but I've warned him." There was a grimness in her voice that carried conviction to Mr. Hearty.

"Thank you, Elizabeth, thank you. I was very upset the other night, very." He suddenly rushed away to the harmonium, where one of the candles was burning smokily.

"Mr. Gupperduck can't come," said Mrs. Bindle as she rearranged the fish-paste sandwiches. "He's got a meeting at Hoxton."

Mr. Hearty made some murmur of response as he dashed across the room to adjust three chairs that lacked symmetry.

"I wish they'd come, Alf," wheezed Mrs. Hearty, hitting the front of a bright green bodice. Sartorially Mrs. Hearty always ran to brilliancy.

"I hope Mr. MacFie will not be late," said Mr. Hearty in a tone of gloomy foreboding.

Mr. MacFie's arrival at that moment, accompanied by Miss MacFie, put an end to this anxiety. Miss MacFie was a tall, flat-chested, angular woman of about forty, with high cheek-bones and almost white eyebrows and eyelashes. She

greeted Mr. Hearty and the others without emotion. Mr. MacFie had eyes for no one but Millie.

The next arrival was the Rev. Mr. Sopley, "all woe and whiskers," as Bindle had once described him. Mournfully he shook hands with all and, seating himself on the first available chair, cast his eyes up towards the ceiling, his habitual attitude.

Alice sidled up to Mrs. Bindle and, in a whisper audible to all, enquired:

"Am I to call out the names, mum?"

"Certainly, Alice," replied Mrs. Bindle. "As each guest arrives you will announce the names clearly." Then turning to Mr. Hearty she said, "I think that you and Mr. MacFie ought to receive the guests at the door."

"Certainly, Elizabeth, certainly," said Mr. Hearty. There was unaccustomed decision in his voice. He was glad of something definite to do. Striding over to Mr. MacFie, he whispered to him and practically dragged him away from Millie. The two of them took up their positions near the door, where they stood staring at each other as if wondering what was to happen next.

Mrs. Hearty from time to time beat her chest.

"It's me breath," she confided to Mr. Sopley, then subsided into wheezing.

"Ha!" Mr. Sopley changed the angle of his gaze. Whenever spoken to he invariably opened his mouth with a jerk, as if he had been suddenly brought back from another world by someone hitting him in the wind. As often as not he re-closed his mouth without further sound. It was obvious to the most casual observer that he was here on earth because Providence had decreed it, and not from any wish of his own.

Suddenly Alice threw open the outer door.

"Mr. Pain and 'is wife, mum," she announced.

Mr. MacFie and Mr. Hearty became instantly galvanised into activity.

"Not his wife," corrected Mrs. Bindle in a whisper.

"But she is 'is wife," protested Alice indignantly. "Ain't you, mum?" she enquired of Mrs. Pain.

Mrs. Pain simpered her acquiescence as she turned to Mr. MacFie and Mr.

Hearty, who had raced towards her.

"You should say 'Mr. and Mrs. Pain,' Alice," said Mrs. Bindle with quiet forbearance.

"Sorry," remarked Alice, turning to go. "I ain't used to this 'ere. Why can't they come in without all this yelling out of names?" she muttered. "They ain't trains."

Mr. Pain, a small man with a bald head and a tuft of black hair in the centre of a protruding forehead, shook hands joyfully with Mr. MacFie and Mr. Hearty. He was wearing a black frock-coat and light brown tweed trousers, a white waistcoat and a royal blue tie. Mrs. Pain was a tall thin woman, garbed in a narrow brown skirt with a cream-coloured bodice, over-elaborated with lace. The sleeves of her blouse reached only just below the elbows, and the cream gloves on her hands failed to form a liaison with the blouse. Round her neck was flung a locket suspended by a massive "gold" chain. Both she and Mr. Pain were violent in their greetings, after which they proceeded over to two chairs by the wall where they seated themselves and proceeded to converse in undertones, Mr. Pain drawing on a pair of black kid gloves.

"Mr. and Mrs. Withers," bawled Alice.

Mrs. Bindle nodded approval, and Mr. and Mrs. Withers shook hands with Mr. Hearty and Mr. MacFie, much as Mr. and Mrs. Pain had done.

Mr. Withers carried a small sandy head on one side, and a frock-coat tightly buttoned over his narrow chest. His smallness was emphasised by the vastness of Mrs. Withers, whose white silk bodice, cut low at the neck, and black skirt, fitted her amorously, as if the wearer's intention were to diminish her size.

For some time Alice carried out her duties with marked success, and Mr. MacFie and Mr. Hearty were kept as busy as an American President at election time. An unfortunate episode occurred in connection with two of the most important members of Mr. MacFie's flock, Mr. Tuddenham and Mr. Muskett.

Mr. Tuddenham was a stout, self-important little man with a red face and a "don't—you—dare—to—argue—with—me—sir" air. Mr. Muskett, on the other hand, was tall and lean with lantern jaws, a sallow complexion and a white beard. Mr. Tuddenham's clothes fitted him like a glove; Mr. Muskett's hung in despairing folds about his person. Mr. Tuddenham wore a high collar, which cut viciously into his red neck; Mr. Muskett's neckwear was nonconformist in cut. Mr.

Tuddenham glared at the world through fierce, bloodshot eyes; Mr. Muskett gazed weakly over the top of a pair of pince-nez that hung at one side. Mr. Muskett's voice was an overpowering boom, contrasting oddly with the thin, high-pitched notes of Mr. Tuddenham. Mr. Tuddenham was as upright as a bantam; Mr. Muskett drooped like a wilted lily. No one had ever seen Mr. Muskett without Mr. Tuddenham, or Mr. Tuddenham without Mr. Muskett.

Alice appeared to have considerable difficulty over their names, during which Mr. MacFie and Mr. Hearty stood pretending not to be aware of the presence of the new arrivals. Eventually Alice nodded reassuringly and, taking a step into the room, announced:

"Mr. Muddenham and Mr. Tuskett."

"Tuddenham, girl, Tuddenham!" shrieked Mr. Tuddenham.

"Muskett, I said, Muskett!" boomed Mr. Muskett.

For a moment Alice regarded them with some apprehension, then her face broke into a smile and, with a sideways nod of her head in the direction of the new guests and a jerk of her thumb, she turned laughing to the door, giving a backward kick of mirth as she went out.

The guests now began to arrive thick and fast.

Miss Torkington brought her tow-coloured hair and pince-nez, and a manner that seemed to shout virtue and chastity. She was all action and vivacity, and nothing could dam the flow of her words, just as none could have convinced her that in her pale-blue princess-robe with its high collar she was not the dernière crie.

Mrs. Bindle had taken up her position near the door, so that she might correct Alice, should occasion arise.

"The butcher and 'is missus," announced Alice.

"Alice, Alice!" protested Mrs. Bindle in a loud whisper. "You mustn't announce people like that. You should say Mr. and Mrs. Gash."

"I asked 'im, mum," protested Alice, "and that's wot 'e said."

Mrs. Bindle looked anxiously from Mr. Gash, in a check suit and red tie, to his wife in a royal blue short skirt, a pink blouse and white boots with tassels. They smiled good-humouredly. Mrs. Bindle sighed her relief.

Mrs. Bindle decided that it would be wise to leave Alice to her own devices. She knew something of the temper of the outraged domestic. In consequence Alice announced without rebuke Mr. Hippitt as "Mr. Pip-Pip," and Mrs. Muspratt as "Miss Musk-Rat."

Presently her voice was heard without raised in angry reproaches.

"What's your name?" she was heard to demand. "I got to call it out."

"No, you don't, Ruthie dear," was the reply.

Mr. Hearty and Mrs. Bindle exchanged glances. They recognised that voice.

"You leggo, I ain't one of them sort," said the voice of Bindle.

"You ain't goin' in till you give me your name, so there!" was Alice's retort.

The guests focused their attention upon the door. Suddenly it opened a foot and then crashed to again.

"Ah! thought you'd got through, didn't you?" they heard Alice cry triumphantly.

Suddenly the door opened again and Bindle entered with Alice striving to restrain him.

"Now, Ruthie, I'm married; if I wasn't, well, anythink might 'appen. Look! 'ere's my coat and 'at, so don't say I 'aven't trusted you. 'Ere, leggo!"

Bindle made an impressive figure in his evening clothes, patent boots, a large "diamond" stud in the centre of his shirt, a geranium in his button-hole, and a red silk handkerchief tucked in the opening of his waistcoat.

"'Ullo, 'Earty!" he cried genially. "'Ere, call 'er orf," indicating Alice with a jerk of his thumb. "Seems to 'ave taken a fancy to me—an' she ain't the first neither," he added.

Mrs. Bindle motioned to Alice to free Bindle, which she did reluctantly.

Bindle looked round the room with interest.

"This the little lot, 'Earty?" he enquired in a hoarse whisper audible to all. "Don't look a very cheer-o crowd, do they? The idea of goin' to 'eaven seems to make 'em low-spirited."

Bindle regarded Mr. MacFie intently, then turning to Mr. Muskett, who happened to be standing near him, he remarked:

"Can't you see 'im in a night-shirt with wings and an 'arp, a-flutterin' about like a little canary. Wonderful place, 'eaven, sir," said Bindle, looking up at Mr. Muskett.

"Sir!" boomed Mr. Muskett.

Bindle started back, then recovering himself and, leaning forward slightly, he said:

"Do you mind doin' that again, sir, jest to see if I can stand it without jumping."

Mr. Muskett glared at him, swung round on his heel and joined Mr. Tuddenham at the other end of the room.

"Seem to 'ave trod on 'is toes," muttered Bindle as he watched Mr. Muskett obviously explaining to Mr. Tuddenham the insult to which he had just been subjected.

Bindle looked about him with interest, the only guest who seemed thoroughly comfortable and at home. Suddenly his eye caught sight of the text above the refreshment-table, and he grinned broadly. Looking about him for someone to share the joke, he took a step towards his nearest neighbour, Miss Torkington.

"Ain't 'e a knock-out!" he remarked, nudging her with his elbow.

"I beg your pardon!" said Miss Torkington, lifting her chin and folding her hands before her.

"'Im, 'Earty," said Bindle, "ain't 'e a knock-out! Look at that! 'So shall Ye All Likewise Perish,'" he read. "Fancy sticking that up over the grub."

Miss Torkington, her hands still folded before her, with head in the air, wheeled round and walked away in what she conceived to be a dignified manner.

Bindle slowly turned and watched her.

"Quaint old bird," he muttered. "I wonder wot I said to 'urt 'er feelin's."

The glee-party of four had formed up near the harmonium. Mr. Hearty was in earnest conversation with the leader. He wished to see Lady Knob-Kerrick's arrival heralded with appropriate music. The leader of the singers was a man

whose serious visage convinced Mr. Hearty that to him might safely be left the selection of "the extra" that was to welcome the patroness of the occasion. Mr. Hearty was unaware that in the leader's heart was a smouldering anger against Lady Knob-Kerrick on account of her rudeness in the recent correspondence that had taken place. Furthermore, he had already received his fee.

"Hi, 'Earty!" Bindle called to Mr. Hearty as he left the leader of the glee-party. "When's the Ole Bird comin'?"

Mr. Hearty turned. "The old bird?" he interrogated with lifted eyebrows.

"Lady Knob-Kerrick," bawled Alice, throwing open the door with a flourish.

Lady Knob-Kerrick sailed into the room, her head held high in supercilious superiority. Following her came her companion, Miss Strint, who had carried self-suppression and toadyism to the point of inspiration. Immediately behind came John, Lady Knob-Kerrick's footman, bearing before him the illuminated address, the purse containing fifty Treasury pound notes, and the silver-mounted hot-water bottle.

Bindle started clapping vigorously. Two or three other guests followed suit; but the look Lady Knob-Kerrick cast about her proved to them conclusively that Bindle had done the wrong thing.

"It is most kind of your ladyship to come." Mr. Hearty fussed about Lady Knob-Kerrick, walking deprecatingly upon his toes. She appeared entirely oblivious of his presence. He turned towards the harmonium and made frantic signals to the leader of the glee-party. Suddenly the quartette broke into song, every word ringing out clearly and distinctly:

> There's the blue eye and the brown eye, the grave eye and the sad,
> There's the pink eye and the green eye and the eye that's rolling mad;
> But of all the eyes that eye me, be they merciful or bad,
> The eye that I would choose is what they call "The Glad."
>
> THE GLAD EYE.

The last line was rolled out sonorously by the bass.

The company looked at one another in amazement. Lady Knob-Kerrick, scarlet

with rage, glared through her lorgnettes at the singers and then at Mr. Hearty, who from where he stood petrified gazed wonderingtly at the glee-party. Mrs. Bindle, with great presence of mind, moved swiftly across the room, and caught the falsetto by the lapel of the coat just as he had opened his mouth to begin his solo verse, dealing with the knowledge acquired by a flapper from the country in the course of a fortnight's holiday in London. Mrs. Bindle made it clear to the leader that as far as the Alton Road Chapel was concerned he was indulging in an optical delusion.

"We are all deeply honoured by your Leddyship's presence this evening," said Mr. MacFie, throwing himself into the breach. "It is——"

"Get me a chair," demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick, still glaring in the direction of the glee-singers.

Bindle rushed at her with a frail-looking hemp-seated chair, which he proceeded to flick with his red silk pocket-handkerchief.

"One be enough, mum?" he enquired solicitously.

Lady Knob-Kerrick regarded him through her lorgnettes.

Mr. Sopley had been detached from his contemplation of the ceiling, and was now led up to Lady Knob-Kerrick.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "we are indeed greatly honoured."

"'Ere, 'ere!" broke in Bindle, attracting to himself the attention of the whole assembly.

"Will your Ladyship make the presentation now?" enquired Mr. Hearty, "or ——"

"Now!" was Lady Knob-Kerrick's uncompromising reply, as she seated herself. "Fetch a table, please," she added, indicating, with an inclination of her head, her footman, who stood with what Bindle called "the prizes."

Mr. Hearty and Mr. Gash trotted off to fetch a small table from the corner of the room. This was placed in front of Lady Knob-Kerrick, and on it John deposited the illuminated address, the bag containing the notes, and the silver-mounted hot-water bottle.

A hush of expectancy fell upon the assembly. Lady Knob-Kerrick rose and was

greeted by respectful applause. Her manner was that of a peacock deigning to acknowledge the existence of a group of sparrows. From a dorothy-bag she drew a typewritten paper, which she proceeded to read.

"I have been asked to present to the Rev. James Sopley, as a mark of the esteem in which he is held by his flock, an illuminated address, a purse of fifty pounds, and a silver-mounted hot-water bottle"—she paused for a moment—"a trifle that shall remind him of the loving hearts he has left behind. (Murmurs of respectful appreciation.)

"Mr. Sopley has fought the good fight in Fulham for upwards of twenty-five years, and he is now about to retire to enjoy the rest that he has so well and thoroughly earned. ("'Ere, 'ere!" from Bindle.) I trust and hope that the Lord will spare him for many years to come. ("I'm sure I would if I was Gawd," whispered Bindle to Mr. Tuddenham, who only glared at him.)

"We have now among us," continued Lady Knob-Kerrick, "a new pastor, a man of sterling worth and sound religious principles. ("That's you!" said Bindle in a hoarse whisper, nudging Mr. MacFie who stood next to him.) I have," proceeded Lady Knob-Kerrick, "sat under him ("Oh, naughty! naughty!" whispered Bindle. Lady Knob-Kerrick glared at him),—sat—sat under him for a number of years at Barton Bridge, where he will always be remembered as a man devoted to" ("Temperance fêtes!" interpolated Bindle.)

The result of the interruption was electrical. Lady Knob-Kerrick dropped her lorgnettes and lost her place. Mr. MacFie's "adam's apple" moved up and down with alarming rapidity, testifying to the great emotional ordeal through which he was passing. Mr. Hearty looked at Mrs. Bindle, Mrs. Bindle looked at Bindle, everybody looked at everybody else, because everyone had heard of the Temperance Fête fiasco. Lady Knob-Kerrick resumed her seat suddenly.

Then it was that Mr. Hearty had an inspiration. With a swift movement which precipitated him on the foot of Miss Torkington (whose anguished expression caused Bindle to mutter, "Fancy 'er bein' able to do that with 'er face!"), he landed beside Mr. Sopley. He managed to detach his eyes from their contemplation of the ceiling and impress on him that he had better make a reply. As he walked the few steps necessary to reach the table, Bindle once more started clapping vigorously, a greeting that was taken up by several of the other guests, but in a more modified manner.

In a mournful and foreboding voice, thoroughly appropriate to an hour of

national disaster, Mr. Sopley thanked Lady Knob-Kerrick for her words, and the others for their notes. He referred to the shepherd, dragged in the sheep, scooped up the righteous, cast out the sinners; in short he said all the most obvious things in the most obvious manner. He promised the Alton Roaders harps and halos, and threw the rest of Fulham into the bottomless pit. With some dexterity he linked-up sin and the taxi-cab, saw in the motor-omnibus the cause of the weakening moral-fibre of the working-classes, expressed it as his conviction that Europe was being drenched in blood because Fulham thought less of faith than of football.

He was frankly pessimistic about the future of the district, an attitude of mind that appeared to have been induced by the garments of the local maidens. Fire and flood he promised Fulham, but made no mention of Hammersmith or Putney. In a voice that throbbed with emotion he took his official leave, having convinced everybody that only his intercessionary powers with heaven had stalled off for so long the impending fate he outlined.

Taking up from the table the bag of fifty pounds, he put it in his pocket and with bowed head walked towards the nearest chair.

"'Ere, you've forgotten your bed-feller, sir!" cried Bindle, picking up the silver-mounted hot-water bottle and the framed address and carrying them over to Mr. Sopley.

Mr. MacFie prepared himself for the ordeal before him. Standing in front of Lady Knob-Kerrick as if she had been an altar, he bowed low before her.

"Your Leddyship." A pause of veneration. "Ma Freends," he continued. "Few meenisters of the Gospel have the preevilege that has been extended to me this evening. It is the will of the Almighty that I succeed a most saintly man (murmurs of approval) in the person of Mr. Sopley. It will be a deefecult poseetion for me to fill. (Mr. Sopley wagged his head from side to side.) In her breeliant oration her Leddyship has emphasised some of the attreebutes of a man whose godliness ye can all testify——"

"You shan't keep me out, you baggage. Can't I hear his dear voice! My Andrew! Oh, Andy! Andy! and they want to keep me away from you."

The interruption came from the door, where Alice was vainly endeavouring to keep out a dishevelled-looking creature, who finally broke through and walked unsteadily towards the table.

Lady Knob-Kerrick turned and stared at the apparition through her lorgnettes.

Mr. MacFie's jaw dropped.

Mr. Sopley for the first time that evening seemed to forget heaven, and devoted himself to terrestrial things. Everybody was gazing with wide-eyed wonder at the cause of the interruption.

"Oh! my Andrew, my little Andy!" cried the woman in hoarse maudlin tones. Her hair, to which was attached a black toque with a brilliant oval of embroidery in front, hung over her left ear. Her clothes, ill-fitting and much stained, hung upon her as if they had been thrown—rather than put on. Her face, intended by Providence to be pretty, was tear-stained and dirty. Her blouse was open at the neck and her boots mud-stained and shapeless.

"What—what is the meaning of this?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick of Mr. MacFie, as she rose from her chair, a veritable Rhadamanthus.

The girl, who was now hanging on to Mr. MacFie's arm, turned and regarded Lady Knob-Kerrick over her shoulder.

"He's my boooy," she spluttered; then closing her eyes her head wobbled from side to side, as if her neck were unable to support it.

"Your what?" thundered Lady Knob-Kerrick.

"My—my boooy," drawled the girl, "husband. Oh! Andy, Andy!" and she clung to Mr. MacFie the more closely in spite of his frantic efforts to shake himself free.

"Mr. MacFie, what is the meaning of this?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick.

"I've—I've never seen her before," stammered Mr. MacFie, looking as if he had been grabbed by an octopus. "On ma oath, your Leddyship. Before ma God!"

"Andy, Andy! don't say such awful things," protested the girl. "You know you married me secret because you said Helen wouldn't let you;" and she sagged away again, half supporting herself on Mr. MacFie's arm.

"Do you know anything of this woman?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick of Miss MacFie.

Miss MacFie shook her head as if the question were an insult.

"Then it was a secret marriage." Lady Knob-Kerrick remembered what she had heard of Mr. MacFie's conduct at the temperance fête. "Mr. MacFie, you have—you have disgraced——"

"Your Leddyship, on ma honour, I sweear——!"

"Don't, Andy, don't!" said the girl, striving to put her hand over his mouth. "Don't! God may strike you dead. He did it once, didn't He? Oh! I've learnt the Bible," she added in a maudlin tone. "I can sing hymns, I can." She began to croon something in a wheezy voice.

Mr. MacFie made a desperate effort to free himself from her clutches, but succeeded only in bringing her to her knees.

"Look at 'im! Look at 'im!" shrieked the girl, "knocking me about, what he swore to love, honour and obey. Oh, you devil, Andy! How you used to behave, and now—and now——"

"I swear it's all a damned lee! It's ma enemy—ma enemy. Woman, I know thee not! Thou art the scarlet woman of Babylon! Get thee from me, I curse thee!" Mr. MacFie's Gaelic blood was up.

"Go it, sir!" said Bindle. "Go it!"

"Ye have come as the ravening wolf upon the sheep-fold at night to destroy the lamb." Mr. MacFie waved his disengaged arm.

"You bein' the lamb, sir, go it!" said Bindle.

"I'll hae the law on ye, woman, I'll hae the law on ye! Ye impostor! Ye harlot!! Ye daughter of Belial!!!" He flung his arm about, and his eyes rolled with almost maniacal fury. "Ma God! ma God! Why persecuteth Thou me?" he cried, lifting his eyes to the ceiling.

Then with a sudden drop to earthly things he appealed to Lady Knob-Kerrick.

"Your Leddyship, your Leddyship, do not believe this woman. She lies! She would ruin me!! I will have her arrested!!! Fetch the police!!!! I demand the police!!!!!"

Lady Knob-Kerrick turned towards the door at the entrance of which stood her footman.

"John, blow your police-whistle," she ordered, practical in all things.

John disappeared. A moment later the raucous sound of a police-whistle was heard in continuous blast.

"That's right!" shouted the woman, "that's right! Blow your police-whistle! Blow your pinkish brains out!" Then with a sudden change she turned to Mr. MacFie. "Oh, Andy, Andy! You never was the same man after you 'ad that drink in you down in the country at the temperance fête. Don't you remember how you laughed with me about that Old Bird being washed out of her carriage?"

"It's a lee! It's a lee! A damnable lee!" shrieked Mr. MacFie.

Mr. MacFie was interrupted in his protestations by a sudden rush of feet, and the hall began to fill with a wild-eyed, dishevelled crowd. Mothers carrying their babies, or pulling along little children. Everyone inviting everyone else to come in. One woman was in hysterics. Lady Knob-Kerrick stared at them in wonder.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded of no one in particular.

"It's a raid, mum, a raid; it's a raid," sobbed a woman, leading two little children with the hand and holding a baby in her disengaged arm.

Lady Knob-Kerrick paled. "A raid!" she faltered.

"Yes, mum, can't you 'ear the police-whistles?"

"Well, I'm damned!" broke in Bindle, slapping his leg in ecstasy; then a moment after, seeing the terror on the women's faces, he cried out:

"It's all right, there ain't no raid. Don't be frightened. It's ole Calves with that bloomin' police-whistle."

"Tell that fool to stop," cried Lady Knob-Kerrick. A special constable pushed his way through the crowd.

"What is all this about, please?" he demanded.

"There's a raid, sir," cried several voices.

"I give this woman in charge," cried Mr. MacFie, dramatically pointing at her who claimed to be his wife.

With alacrity the special pulled his note-book out of his pocket.

"The charge, sir?" he enquired.

"She says she's ma wife."

The special looked up from his note-book. "That is not an indictable offence, sir, I'm afraid."

"But she's na ma wife," protested Mr. MacFie.

Another rush of people seeking shelter swept the constable on one side, and when he once more strove to take up the thread, the woman had disappeared.

The results of John's vigour with the police-whistle were far-reaching. Omnibuses had drawn up to the kerb and had been promptly deserted by passengers and crew. The trains on the District Railway were plunged in darkness and the authorities at Putney Bridge Station and East Putney telephoned through that there was a big air-raid. Although nothing had been heard at head-quarters, it was deemed advisable to take precautions. Special constables, nurses and ambulances were called out, anti-aircraft stations warned, and tens of thousands of people sent scuttling home.

Bindle was one of the first to leave the School-room, and he made his way over to Dick Little's flat at Chelsea.

"Ah!" cried Dick Little as he opened the door, "Nancy's back. This way," he added, walking towards his bedroom.

In front of the dressing-table stood Private "Nancy" Dane, the far-famed Pierrette of the Passchendaele Pierrots. He was in the act of removing from his closely-cropped head a dark wig to which was attached a black toque with an oval of vivid-coloured embroidery.

"Well, that's that!" he remarked as he laid it on the table. "Hullo, Bindle!" he cried. "All Clear?"

"All Clear!" replied Bindle as he seated himself upon a chair and proceeded to light the big cigar that Dick Little handed him. Dick Little threw himself upon the bed.

"You done it fine," remarked Bindle approvingly, as he watched Dane slowly transform himself into a private of the line. "Pore ole Mac," he added, "'e got the wind up proper."

"Good show, what?" queried Dick Little as he lazily pulled at his pipe, tired after a long day's work in the hospital.

"Seemed a bit cruel to me," said Dane as he struggled out of a pair of hefty-looking corsets.

"Cruel!" cried Bindle indignantly, as he sat up straight in his chair. "Cruel! with 'im a-tryin' to take the gal away from one of the boys wot's fightin' at the front. Cruel! It wouldn't be cruel, Mr. Nancy, if 'e was cut up an' salted an' given to the 'Uns as a meat ration;" and with this ferocious pronouncement Bindle sank back again in his chair and puffed away at his cigar.

"Sorry!" said Dane, laboriously pulling off a stocking.

"Right-o!" said Bindle cheerfully. Then after a pause he added, "I got to thank Ole 'Amlet for that little idea, and you, sir, for findin' Mr. Nancy. Did it wonderful well, 'e did; still," remarked Bindle meditatively, "I wish they 'adn't blown that police-whistle. Them pore women an' kids was that scared, made me feel I didn't ought to 'ave done it; but then, 'ow was I to know that the Ole Bird was goin' to 'anky-panky like that with Calves. Took 'er name they did, that's somethink. Any'ow, ole Mac won't go 'angin' round Millikins again for many a long day. If 'e does I'll punch 'is bloomin' 'ead."

The next day Lady Knob-Kerrick and John were summoned for causing to be blown to the public confusion a police-whistle, and although the summonses were dismissed the magistrate said some very caustic things about the insensate folly of excitable women. He furthermore made it clear that if anybody blew a police-whistle in the south-western district because somebody else's wife had come back unexpectedly, he would without hesitation pass a sentence that would discourage any repetition of so unscrupulous and unpardonable an act.

Mr. MacFie cleared his character to some extent by a sermon on the following Sunday upon the ninth commandment, and by inserting an advertisement in the principal papers offering £20 to anyone who would give information as to the identity of the woman who on the night of the 28th had created a disturbance in the Alton Road School Room.

CHAPTER IX

THE LETTING OF NUMBER SIX

I

"An' what am I to do if there's an air-raid?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle deliberately emptied his coffee-cup, replaced it in its saucer, sat back further in his chair as a sign of repletion, then turned to Mrs. Bindle, who had been watching him with angry eyes.

"Well, there's always Gawd an' Mr. Gupperduck, Mrs. B.," he remarked, with the air of a man suggesting an unfailing source of inspiration.

"You always was a scoffer, you with your black 'eart." Mrs. Bindle's ire was rising, and her diction in consequence losing something of its customary precision. "You know I ain't strong and—and 'ow them guns an' bombs frighten me." There was in Mrs. Bindle's voice a note of entreaty.

"A daughter o' the Lord didn't ought to be afraid of an 'Un; besides, you can go round an' 'old 'Earty's 'and. 'E's a rare ole 'ero when there's guns goin' off."

"I knew I shouldn't get any sympathy from you," complained Mrs. Bindle, rising and proceeding to bang away the breakfast things. When Mrs. Bindle was suffering from any great stress of emotion, she expressed her feelings by the noise she made. Ironing gave her the greatest opportunities. She could bang the iron on the ironing-board, back again to the stand, and finally on to the stove.

"I got to earn a livin'," remarked Bindle philosophically as he proceeded to light his pipe. "It's war-time too, an' nobody can't afford to move, so pore ole Joe 'as to take any ole job 'e can get 'old of."

"You lorst your last job a-purpose," snapped Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle looked at her sharply. Sometimes Mrs. Bindle's accuracy in things where she could not possibly possess knowledge was startling. Bindle had temporarily relinquished his situation in the Removal Department of Harridge's Stores in

order to become caretaker at Fulham Square Mansions whilst his intimate, Charlie Hart, had a fortnight's holiday.

Mrs. Hart had been ill, and the doctor said that change of air and scene were essential to her recovery. She could not go alone, and if Mr. Hart went with her and a substitute were obtained, he would in all probability, as Charlie put it, "pinch my bloomin' job." Bindle he knew he could trust, and so it came about that for a fortnight Bindle was to "sleep out."

"Well, you see," Bindle explained, "I couldn't disappoint ole Charlie——"

"And what about me?" demanded Mrs. Bindle, looking round from a fierce attack upon the kitchen stove with the poker.

"Well," said Bindle slowly, "you're a disappointed woman as it is, Mrs. B., so you ain't 'urt."

Mrs. Bindle resumed her attack upon the fire with increased vigour.

"You always was a selfish beast, Bindle," she retorted. "You'll be sorry when I'm dead."

Any reference by Mrs. Bindle to the remorse that he would suffer after her death, Bindle always regarded as a sort of "take cover" signal. Mrs. Bindle was hysterical, and Bindle liked to be well out of the way before the storm broke. He had heard, but had never had an opportunity of testing the statement, that without an audience dogs will not fight and women will never have hysterics.

When, therefore, Mrs. Bindle referred to what Bindle widower would suffer on account of what Bindle benedict had neglected to do, he rose, picking up the faded blue-and-white cricket-cap he invariably wore, and walked towards the door.

"There'll be a lot o' tips, ole Charlie says," he remarked, "an' I'll buy you somethink. I'll run in every day to see you ain't gone off with 'Guppy.'"

"You're a dirty-minded beast, Bindle," raged Mrs. Bindle; but her words beat up against the back door, through which Bindle had vanished. He had become a master of strategical retreat.

Whistling shrilly, he proceeded along the Fulham Road in the direction of Fulham Square Mansions. Bindle was in a happy frame of mind. It would be

strange if a fortnight as porter at Fulham Square Mansions did not produce something in the way of a diversion.

"Cheer-o, uncle!" The remark came from a brazen-faced girl waiting for a bus.

Bindle frowned as he looked her up and down, from the low-cut transparent blouse to the short skirt, reaching little below her knees.

"If I *was* your uncle, young woman," he remarked, "I'd slap you into becomin' decent."

The girl jumped on to a bus that had just drawn up, and with a swirl of skirt and wealth of limb, waved her hand as she climbed the stairs.

"So long, old dear!" she cried.

"Got enough powder on 'er face to whitewash 'er feet," remarked a workman to Bindle as he resumed his walk.

"Women is funny things," responded Bindle. "They never seems to be wearin' so little, but wot they can't leave orf a bit more."

"You're right, mate," replied the man when he had digested the remark. "If I was the police I'd run 'em in."

"Well," said Bindle philosophically, "there is some wot likes to see all the goods in the window. S'long!" and he turned off the Fulham Road, leaving the workman to pursue his journey puzzling over Bindle's enigmatical utterance.

"'Ullo, Charlie!" greeted Bindle, as he entered the porter's lodge of Fulham Square Mansions. "'Ere I am, come to take care of all the little birds in the nest wot you're a-leavin' behind."

Charlie Hart was a big man with a heavy moustache, a brow whereon the creases of worry had a perpetual abiding-place, and an indeterminate chin. "Charlie ought to wear a beard," was Bindle's verdict.

"Glad you come, Joe. I'll 'ave time to go over things again. Train don't go till four."

During the next few hours Bindle was once more taken over the salient features of the life of a porter at a block of residential flats. Charlie Hart had no system or order in conveying his instructions, and Bindle saw that he would have to

depend upon his own wits to meet such crises as arose.

Mrs. Sedge, Mrs. Hart's mother, would look after those tenants who did not possess servants.

"She's all right when she ain't after 'Royal Richard,'" explained Charlie Hart.

"An' who's Royal Richard?" enquired Bindle with interest.

"Gin!" was Charlie Hart's laconic response.

Charlie enumerated the numbers of the flats, the occupants of which were to be "done for." One thing he particularly emphasised, Number Six was temporarily vacant. The owner was away; but it was let furnished from the following Monday to a Miss Cissie Boye, who was one of those to be "done for." Bindle was particularly cautioned to see that there were no "carryings on," whereat he winked reassuringly.

Mrs. Sedge was a stolid matron, whose outlook on life had reached the dregs of pessimism.

"Oh! don't ask me," was the phrase with which she warded off any attempt at conversation. Hers was a soul dedicated to Royal Richard and silence.

"Cheery little thing," was Bindle's summing up of the gloomy Mrs. Sedge.

Bindle had not been in charge an hour before Number Seven began to get troublesome. He was a choleric ex-Indian civil servant.

"Where's that damned fellow Hart?" he roared, thrusting his head into the porter's lodge.

"'E's gone to the damned seaside," replied Bindle imperturbably, as he proceeded to light his pipe with elaborate calm. "Taken 'is damned wife with 'im," he added.

Number Seven gasped.

"And who the devil are you?" he demanded.

"Well," replied Bindle with a grin, "on the 'Alls I'm Little Tich; but 'ere I calls myself Joe Bindle, known as "Oly Joe.'"

For a moment Number Seven, his customary redness of face transformed to

purple, stood regarding Bindle fiercely.

"Then be damned to you!" he burst out, and turning on his heel, dashed upstairs.

"I ain't lived with Mrs. B. nineteen years without learnin' 'ow to 'andle explosives," remarked Bindle as he settled down to read an evening newspaper he had discovered in the letter box.

Bindle soon discovered that the life of a porter at residential flats is strangely lacking in repose. Everybody seemed either to want something sent up, or came to complain that their instructions had not been carried out.

The day passed with amazing rapidity. At eight o'clock Bindle stepped round to The Ancient Earl for a glass of beer. When he returned at nine-thirty he found his room in a state of siege.

"Oh, here he is!" said someone. Bindle smiled happily.

"Where the devil have you been?" demanded Number Seven angrily.

Bindle looked at him steadily. Having apparently established Number Seven's identity to his entire satisfaction, he spoke.

"Now look 'ere, sir, this is the second time to-day I've 'ad to speak to you about your language. This ain't a peace-meetin'. You speakin' like that before ladies too. I'm surprised at you, I am really. Now 'op it an' learn some nice words, an' then come back an' beg prettily, an' p'raps I'll give you a bit o' cake."

"You damned insolent fellow!" thundered Number Seven, "I'll report you, I'll ——"

"Look 'ere," remarked Bindle tranquilly, "if you ain't gone by the time I've finished lightin' this pipe,"—he struck a match deliberately,—"I'll 'oof it myself, an' then who'll fetch up all the coals in the mornin'?"

This master-stroke of strategy turned public opinion dead against Number Seven, who retired amidst a murmur of disapproving voices.

"It's 'ard if I can't go out to see a dyin' wife an' child, without 'im a-comin' usin' 'ot words like that," grumbled Bindle, as he proceeded to investigate the cases of the other tenants and their minions.

Number One was expecting a parcel. Had it arrived?

No, it had not, but Bindle would not rest until it did.

Number Twelve, a tall, melancholy-visaged man, had lost Fluffles. Where did Bindle think she was?

"P'raps she's taken up with another cove, sir," suggested Bindle sympathetically. "You never knows where you are with women."

The maid from Number Fifteen giggled.

Number Twelve explained in a weary tone that Fluffles was a Pekinese spaniel.

"A dog, you say, sir," cried Bindle, "why didn't you say so before? I might 'ave advertised for—well, well, I'll keep a look out."

"Wot's that?" he enquired of the maid from Number Eight. "No coal? Can't fetch coal up after six o'clock. That's the rules," he added with decision.

"But we must have some, we can't go to bed without coal," snapped the girl, an undersized, shrewish little creature.

"Well, Queenie," responded Bindle imperturbably, "you'll 'ave to take some firewood to bed with you, if you wants company; coal you don't get to-night. Wot about a log?"

"My name's not 'Queenie,'" snapped the girl.

"Ain't it now," remarked Bindle; "shows your father and mother 'adn't an eye for the right thing, don't it?"

"I tell you we must have coal," persisted the girl.

"Now look 'ere, Queenie, my dear, a gal as wants to take coal to bed with 'er ain't —well, she ain't respectable. Now orf you goes like a good gal."

"It's in case of raids, you saucy 'ound!" screeched "Queenie." "I'll get even with you yet, you red-nosed little bounder! I'll pay you!"

"Funny where they learns it all," remarked Bindle to Number Eleven, a quiet little old lady who wanted a postage stamp.

The little lady smiled.

"She won't be wantin' coal in the next world if she goes on like that, will she,

mum?" said Bindle as he handed her the stamp.

"Her mistress has a weak heart," ventured Number Eleven, "and during the raids she shivers so——"

"Now ain't that jest like a woman, beggin' your pardon, mum. Why didn't Queenie say that instead of showin' 'ow bad she's been brought up? Right-o! I'll take her up some coal."

Ten minutes later Bindle surprised "Queenie" by appearing at the door of Number Eight with a pailful of coal. She stared at him in surprise. Bindle grinned.

"'Ere you are, Queenie," he said cheerfully. "Now you'll be able to go to sleep with a bit in each 'and, an' maybe there'll be a bit over to put in your mouth."

"Look 'ere, don't you go callin' me 'Queenie'; that ain't my name, so there," and the girl banged the door in his face.

"She'll grow up jest like Mrs. B.," murmured Bindle, as he slowly descended the stairs, "an' p'raps she can't even cook. I wonder if she's religious. Sort o' zoo this 'ere little 'ole. Shouldn't be surprised if things was to 'appen before Ole Charlie gets 'ome again!" and Bindle returned to his lodge, where, removing his boots and throwing off his coat, he lay down on the couch that served as a bed for the porter at Fulham Square Mansions.

During the next two days Bindle discovered that his duties were endless. Everybody seemed to want something, or have some complaint to make. He was expected to be always at his post, night and day, and if he were not, he was threatened with a possible complaint to the Secretary of the Company to which the flats belonged.

Bindle's fertile brain, however, was not long in devising a means of relieving the monotony without compromising "pore Ole Charlie." He sent home for his special constable's uniform, although he had obtained a fortnight's leave on account of his work. Henceforth, whenever he required relaxation, he donned his official garb, which he found a sure defence against all complaints.

"Well, Queenie," he remarked one evening to the maid at Number Eight, "I'm orf to catch the robbers wot might carry you away."

"I can see you catchin' a man," snorted the girl scornfully.

"Sorry I can't return the compliment, little love-bird," retorted Bindle. "S'long!"

"Queenie" had found her match.

II

"You—er—have a furnished—er—flat to let."

Bindle looked up from the paper he was reading.

A timid, mouse-like little man with side-whiskers and a deprecating manner stood on the threshold.

"Come in, sir," said Bindle heartily; "but I'm afraid it's let."

"But the board's up," replied the applicant.

Bindle rose, walked to the outer door, and there saw the notice-board announcing that a furnished-flat was to let.

"Funny me not noticin' that," he murmured to himself, as he returned to the porter's lodge.

"Was you wantin' it for long, sir?" he enquired.

"A month, I think," was the reply; "but three weeks——"

"I'm sorry, sir," began Bindle, then he smacked his leg with such suddenness that the stranger started back in alarm, his soft felt hat falling from his head and hanging behind him attached to a hat-guard.

"Now isn't that jest like me!" cried Bindle, his face wreathed in smiles.

The stranger eyed Bindle nervously, as he fumbled to retrieve his lost head-gear, looking like a dog endeavouring to ascertain if he still possessed a tail.

"I was thinkin' of the other one," said Bindle. "Yes; there's Number Six to let from next Monday."

"What is the rent?" enquired the caller.

Bindle, who had no idea of the rent of furnished flats, decided to temporise. "I'll go and ask, sir," he said. "Wot was you exactly wantin', an' about wot figure?"

"Well, a bedroom, bath-room, sitting-room, kitchen and attendance, would do," was the reply. "I do not want to pay more than three and a half guineas a week."

"Now ain't that funny!" cried Bindle, and without waiting to explain what was funny, he picked up the key of Number Six from his desk. "Now you jest come with me, sir, an' I'll show you the very place you're wantin'."

Number Six consisted of two bedrooms, a sitting-room, bath-room and kitchen. Charlie Hart had taken Bindle over it, explaining that Miss Cissie Boye, who was entering into occupation on the following Monday, would use only the smaller bedroom with the single bed, therefore the double-bedded room was to remain locked.

The applicant, who introduced himself as Mr. Jabez Stiffson, expressed himself as quite satisfied with all he saw, and agreed to enter into possession on the following Monday afternoon, at a rental of three and a half guineas a week. He appeared mildly surprised at Bindle waiving the question of references and a deposit; but agreed that the smaller bedroom should be kept locked, as containing the owner's personal possessions. Mrs. Stiffson, he explained, was staying with friends in the country, their own house being let; but she would join him on the Tuesday morning.

In the privacy of his own apartment, Bindle rubbed his hands with glee. "If this ain't goin' to be a little story for the Night Club," he murmured, "well, put me down as a Cuthbert."

He persuaded Mrs. Sedge to get both rooms ready, "in case of accidents," as he expressed it. Bindle foresaw that there might be some difficulty in the matter of catering for Mr. Jabez Stiffson; but he left that to the inspiration of the moment.

He looked forward to Monday as a schoolboy looks forward to the summer holidays. He forgot to rebuke "Queenie" when she became impertinent, he allowed Number Seven to swear with impunity, and he even forgot to don his special's uniform and go "on duty"; in short, he forgot everything save the all-absorbing topic of Miss Cissie Boye and Mr. Jabez Stiffson.

On Monday, Mrs. Sedge was persuaded to take a half day off. She announced her intention of putting some flowers on her husband's grave in Kilburn Cemetery.

"Well," remarked Bindle, who knew that Mrs. Sedge's "Kilburn Cemetery" was

the public-bar of The Ancient Earl, "you won't want no bus fares."

"You go hon, with a nose like that," retorted Mrs. Sedge, in no way displeased.

"Well, don't be late in the morning," grinned Bindle.

At six-thirty, Mr. Jabez Stiffson arrived with a bewildering collection of impedimenta, ranging from a canary in a cage to a thermos flask.

Bindle put all he could in the double-bedded room, the rest he managed to store in the kitchen. A slight difficulty arose over the canary, Mr. Stiffson suggested the dining-room.

"Wouldn't 'e sort o' feel lonely without seein' you when 'e opened 'is little eyes?" questioned Bindle solicitously. "A cove I knew once 'ad a canary which 'ad a fit through bein' lonely, and they 'ad to throw water over 'im to bring 'im to, an' then wot d'you think, sir?"

Mr. Stiffson shook his head in mournful foreboding.

"'E come to a sparrow, 'e did really, sir."

That settled the canary, who slept with Mr. Stiffson.

It was nearly eight before Mr. Stiffson was settled, and he announced his intention of going out to dine. At ten he was ready for bed, having implored Bindle to see that he was up by eight as Mrs. Stiffson would inevitably arrive at ten.

"I'm a very heavy sleeper," he announced, to Bindle's great relief. "And my watch has stopped," he added; "some dirt must have got into the works. If Mrs. Stiffson were to arrive before I was up——" He did not venture to state what would be the probable consequence; but his manner implied that Mrs. Stiffson was a being of whom he stood in great awe.

Just as Bindle was leaving him for the night, Mr. Stiffson called him back.

"Porter, I'm worried about Oscar." Bindle noticed that Mr. Stiffson's hands were moving nervously.

"Are you really, sir?" enquired Bindle, wondering who Oscar might be.

"The bird, you know," continued Mr. Stiffson, answering Bindle's unuttered question. "You—you don't think it will be unhygienic for him to sleep with me?"

"Sure of it, sir," replied Bindle, entirely at a loss as to Mr. Stiffson's meaning.

Mr. Stiffson sighed his relief and bade Bindle good night, with a final exhortation as to waking him at eight. "You know," he added, "I always sleep through air-raids."

Mr. Stiffson's bugbear in life was lest he should over-sleep. He seldom failed to wake of his own accord; but, constitutionally lacking in self-reliance, he felt that at any moment he might commit the unpardonable sin of over-sleeping.

Bindle returned to his room to await the arrival of Miss Cissie Boye.

It was nearly midnight when his alert ear caught the sound of a taxi drawing up outside. As he opened the outer door, Miss Cissie Boye appeared at the top of the stone-steps.

Bindle caught a glimpse of a dainty little creature in a long travelling coat with fur at the collar, cuffs and round the bottom, a small travelling hat and a thick veil.

"Oh, can you help with my luggage?" she cried.

"Right-o, miss! You go in there and sit by the fire. We'll 'ave things right in a jiffy;" and Bindle proceeded to tackle Miss Boye's luggage, which consisted of a large dress-basket, a suit-case and a bundle of rugs and umbrellas. When these had been placed in the hall, and the taxi-man paid, Bindle went into his lodge.

Miss Boye was sitting before the fire, her coat thrown open and her veil thrown back. Between her dainty fingers she held a cigarette.

"So that's that!" she cried. "I'm so tired, Mr. Porter."

Bindle regarded her with admiration. Honey-coloured, fluffy hair, blue eyes, dark eyebrows and lashes, pretty, petite features, and a manner that suggested half baby, half woman-of-the-world,—Bindle found her wholly alluring.

"I'm afraid we can't get that little picnic 'amper of yours upstairs to-night, miss," he remarked.

Miss Boye laughed. "Isn't it huge?" she cried. "It needn't go up till the morning. I've all I want in the suit-case."

"You must 'ave a rare lot o' duds, miss," remarked Bindle.

"Duds?" interrogated Miss Boye.

"Clothes, miss," explained Bindle.

Miss Boye laughed lightly. Miss Boye laughed at everything.

"Now I must go to bed. I've got a 'call' to-morrow at eleven."

As they went upstairs, Bindle learnt quite a lot about Miss Boye, among other things that she was appearing in the revue at the Regent Theatre known as "Kiss Me Quick," that she never ate suppers, that she took a warm bath every morning, and liked coffee, bacon and eggs and strawberry jam for breakfast.

"You'll be very quiet, miss, in the flat, won't you?" he whispered.

"Sure," replied Miss Boye.

"They're such a funny lot 'ere," he explained. "If a fly wakes up too early, or a bird 'as a nightmare, they comes down an' complains next mornin'."

Miss Boye laughed.

"'Ush! miss, please," whispered Bindle as he switched on the electric light in the hall of Number Six.

Bindle showed the new tenant the sitting-room, bathroom, kitchen, and finally her own bedroom.

"You will be quiet, miss, won't you?" Bindle interrogated anxiously, "or you may wake Oscar?"

"Who's Oscar?" queried Miss Boye.

"You'll see 'im in the mornin', miss," replied Bindle with a grin. "Good night, miss."

"Good night, Mr. Porter," smiled Miss Boye, and she closed the door.

"Now I wonder if anythink will 'appen before Ole Whiskers gets up in the mornin'," mused Bindle as he descended the stairs to his room.

CHAPTER X

THE DOWNFALL OF MR. JABEZ STIFFSON

I

The next morning Bindle let Mrs. Sedge in at her usual time, seven o'clock.

"Now mind, mother," he said, "four eggs and plenty o' bacon an' coffee, Number Six 'as got a appetite; 'ad no supper, pore gal."

Mrs. Sedge grunted. Kilburn Cemetery had a depressing effect upon her.

"I'll take it up myself," remarked Bindle casually.

Mrs. Sedge eyed him deliberately.

"She's pretty, then," she said. "Ain't you men jest all alike!" She proceeded to shake her head in hopeless despair.

Bindle stood watching her as she descended to the Harts' kitchen.

"She's got an 'ead-piece on 'er, 'as ole Sedgy," he muttered. "Fancy 'er a-tumblin' to it like that, an' 'er still 'alf full o' Royal Richard."

Having prepared and eaten his own breakfast, Bindle sat down and waited. At five minutes past nine he rose.

"It's time Oscar an' Ole Whiskers was up an' doin'," he murmured as he stood in front of the dingy looking-glass over the fireplace. "Joe Bindle, there's a-goin' to be rare doin's in Number Six to-day, and it may mean that you'll lose your job, you ole reprobate."

At the head of the stairs of the second floor Bindle stopped as if he had been shot.

"'Old me, 'Orace!" he muttered. "If it ain't 'er!"

Running towards him was Miss Boye in a white silk wrapper, a white lace matinée cap, her stockingless feet thrust into dainty slippers.

Bindle eyed her appreciatively.

"Oh, Mr. Porter!" she cried breathlessly, "there's a man in my bath."

"A wot, miss?" enquired Bindle in astonishment.

"A man, I heard him splashing and I peeped in,—I only just peeped, you know, Mr. Porter,—and there was a funny little man in spectacles with whiskers. Isn't it lovely!" she cried, clapping her hands gleefully. "Where could he have come from?"

"Well, personally myself, I shouldn't call 'im lovely," muttered Bindle. "I s'pose it's only a matter o' taste."

"But where did he come from?" persisted Cissie Boye excitedly.

"'E must 'ave been left be'ind by the other tenant," said Bindle, grinning widely. "I must see into this. Now you'd better get back, miss. You mustn't go 'opping about like this, or I'll lose my job."

"Why! Don't I look nice?" asked Miss Boye archly, looking down at herself.

"That's jest it, miss," said Bindle. "If Number Seven or Number Eighteen was to see you like that, well, anythink might 'appen. Now we'll find out about this man wot you think 'as got into your bath."

Followed by Miss Boye, Bindle entered the outer door of Number Six. As he did so Mr. Stiffson emerged from the bathroom in a faded pink bath-robe and yellow felt slippers, with a towel over his shoulder and a sponge in his hand. He gave one startled glance past Bindle at Cissie Boye and, with a strange noise in his throat, turned and fled back to the bathroom, bolting the door behind him.

"Isn't he a scream!" gurgled Miss Boye. "Oh, what would Bobbie say?"

Like a decree of fate Bindle marched up to the bathroom door and knocked imperiously.

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Stiffson in a trembling voice.

"It's me," responded Bindle sternly. "Open the door, sir, *if* you please. I can't 'ave you a-frightening this young lady."

"Tell her to go away, and then I'll come out," was the response.

Miss Boye giggled.

"You'd better come out, sir." There was decision in Bindle's voice.

"I'll go into my room," she whispered, "and then I'll come out again, see?"

Bindle did see, and nodded his head vigorously. Miss Boye disappeared.

"She ain't 'ere now, sir," he said, "so you'd better come out."

The bathroom door was cautiously opened, and Mr. Stiffson looked out with terror-dilated eyes.

"Is she really——?"

"Of course she is," said Bindle reassuringly. "Fancy you bein' afraid of a pretty little bit o' fluff like that."

"But—but—she was in her——"

"Of course she was, she was goin' to 'ave a rinse in there," Bindle indicated the bathroom with his thumb, "when you frightened 'er. Dirty trick a-frightening of a pretty gal like that."

With affected indifference Bindle strolled over to the bathroom, looked in and then stood before the door.

"Look! there she is again!" almost shrieked Mr. Stiffson, dashing for Bindle and endeavouring to get past him into the bathroom.

"There, there, sir," said Bindle soothingly, "you're a very lucky cove, only you don't seem to know it."

"But—but—Mrs. Stiffson——"

There was terror in Mr. Stiffson's voice. On his forehead beads of perspiration glistened.

"What the wife don't see the 'usband don't 'ave to explain," remarked Bindle oracularly.

"But she's in my flat," persisted Mr. Stiffson.

"Oh! you naughty old thing!" cried Cissie Boye. "It's you who are in my flat."

"But I came in last night," quavered Mr. Stiffson.

"So did I—didn't I, Mr. Porter?" She turned to Bindle for corroboration.

"Take my dyin' oath on it, miss," said Bindle.

"But——" began Mr. Stiffson, then stopped, at loss how to proceed.

"Look 'ere," said Bindle pleasantly, "there's been a little mistake, sort of a misunderstandin', an' things 'ave got a bit mixed. You can say it's me wot's done it if you like. Now you'd better both get dressed an' come an' 'ave breakfast." Then turning to Mr. Stiffson he said, "Don't you think o' meetin' your missis on an empty stomach. I'm married myself, an' Mrs. B.'s as 'ot as ginger when there's another bit o' skirt about."

Cissie Boye slowly approached Mr. Stiffson. "You're surely not afraid of little me, Mr. Man?" she enquired, looking deliciously impudent.

That was exactly what Mr. Stiffson was afraid of, and he edged nearer to Bindle.

"But Mrs. Stiffson——" he stammered, regarding Cissie Boye like one hypnotised.

"Oh! you naughty old thing!" admonished Miss Boye, enjoying Mr. Stiffson's embarrassment. "You come into my flat, then talk about your wife," and she laughed happily.

"Now look 'ere, sir," said Bindle, "there's been a little mistake, an' this young lady is willin' to forgive an' forget, an' you ain't a-goin' to 'old out, are you? Now you jest run in an' get rid o' them petticoats, come out lookin' like a man, an' then wot-o! for a nice little breakfast which'll all be over before your missis turns up at ten o'clock, see! You can trust me, married myself I am," he added as if to explain his breadth of view in such matters.

"But I can't——" began Mr. Stiffson.

"Oh, yes you can, sir, an' wot's more you'll like it." Bindle gently propelled the protesting Mr. Stiffson past Cissie Boye towards his room.

"Don't forget now, in a quarter of an hour, I'll be up with the coffee an' bacon an' eggs. You're a rare lucky cove, sir, only you don't know it."

"I'm so hungry," wailed Cissie Boye.

"Of course you are, miss," said Bindle sympathetically. "I'll get a move on."

"Oh! isn't he delicious," gurgled Cissie Boye. "Isn't he a perfect scream; but how did he get here, Mr. Porter?"

"Well, miss, the only wonder to me is that 'alf Fulham ain't 'ere to see you a-lookin' like that. Now you jest get a rinse in your room an'——"

"A rinse, what's that?" enquired Cissie.

"You does it with soap an' water, miss, an' you might add a bit or two of lace, jest in case the neighbours was to come in. Now I must be orf. Old Sedgy ain't at 'er best after them 'alf days with Royal Richard. Don't let 'im nip orf, miss, will you?" Bindle added anxiously. "'E's that modest an' retirin' like, that e' might try."

At that moment Mr. Stiffson put his head out of his door. "Porter!" he stammered, "Oscar has not had his breakfast; it's on the kitchen mantelpiece." He shut the door hurriedly.

"Oscar's got to wait," muttered Bindle as he hurried downstairs.

Ten minutes later he had the gas-stove lighted in the sitting-room, and coffee, eggs and bacon, bread and butter, strawberry jam and marmalade ready on the table.

Miss Boye emerged from her room, a vision of loveliness in a pale-blue teagown, open at the throat, with a flurry of white lace cascading down the front. There was a good deal of Cissie Boye visible in spite of the lace. She still wore her matinée cap with the blue ribbons, and Bindle frankly envied Mr. Stiffson.

"Now, sir," he cried, banging at the laggard's door, "the coffee and the lady's waitin', an' I want to feed Oscar."

Mr. Stiffson came out timidly. He evidently realised the importance of the occasion. He wore a white satin tie reposing beneath a low collar of nonconformity, a black frock-coat with a waistcoat that had been bought at a moment of indecision as to whether it should be a morning or evening affair, light trousers, and spats.

"My, ain't we dressy!" cried Bindle, looking appreciatively at Mr. Stiffson's trousers. "You got 'er beaten with them bags, sir, or my name ain't Joe Bindle."

Mr. Stiffson coughed nervously behind his hand.

"Now," continued Bindle, "you got a good hour, then we must see wot's to be done. I'll keep the Ole Bird away."

"The Old Bird?" questioned Mr. Stiffson in a thin voice as he opened the door; "but Oscar is only——"

"I mean your missis, sir," explained Bindle. "You leave 'er to me."

"Come on, Mr. Man," cried Cissie Boye, "don't be afraid, I never eat men when there's eggs and bacon."

Mr. Stiffson motioned Bindle to accompany him into the sitting-room.

"I got to see to Oscar," said Bindle reassuringly.

"Now sit down," ordered Cissie Boye. Mr. Stiffson seated himself on the edge of the chair opposite to her. She busied herself with the coffee, bacon and eggs. Mr. Stiffson watched her with the air of a man who is prepared to bolt at any moment. He cast anxious eyes towards the clock. It pointed to a quarter to nine. Bindle had taken the precaution of putting it back an hour.

Suddenly Oscar burst into full song. Mr. Stiffson sighed his relief. Oscar had had his breakfast.

"Now, Mr. Man, eat," commanded Cissie Boye, "and," handing him a cup of coffee, "drink."

"An' be merry, sir," added Bindle, who entered at the moment. "You're 'avin' the time of your life, an' don't you forget it."

Mr. Stiffson looked as if the passage of centuries would never permit him to forget.

"An' now I'll leave you little love-birds," said Bindle with the cheerful assurance of a cupid, "an' go an' keep watch."

"But——" protested Mr. Stiffson, half rising from his chair.

"Oh! do sit down, old thing!" cried Cissie; "you're spoiling my breakfast."

Mr. Stiffson subsided. Destiny had clearly taken a hand in the affair.

"Now you jest enjoy your little selves," apostrophized Bindle, "an' then we'll try an' find out 'ow all this 'ere 'appened. It does me, blowed if it don't."

II

"I'm not aware that I speak indistinctly." The voice was uncompromising, the deportment aggressive. "I said 'Mr. Jabez Stiffson.'"

"You did, mum," agreed Bindle tactfully; "I 'eard you myself quite plainly."

"Then where is he? I'm Mrs. Stiffson."

Mrs. Stiffson was a tall woman of generous proportions. Her hair was grey, her features virtuously hard, her manner overwhelming. Her movements gave no suggestion of limbs, she seemed to wheel along with a slight swaying of the body from side to side.

"Well?" she interrogated.

"'E's sort of engaged, mum," temporised Bindle, "'avin' breakfast. I'll tell 'im you're 'ere. I'll break it gently to 'im. You know, mum, joy sometimes kills, an' 'e don't look strong."

Without a word Mrs. Stiffson wheeled round and, ignoring the lift, marched for the stairs. As he followed, Bindle remembered with satisfaction that he had omitted to close the outer door of Number Six.

Straight up the stairs, like "never-ending Time," marched Mrs. Stiffson. She did not hurry, she did not pause, she climbed evenly, mechanically, a model wife seeking her mate.

Any doubts that Bindle may have had as to Mrs. Stiffson's ability to find the husband she sought were set at rest by the shrill pipings of Oscar. Even a trained detective could not have overlooked so obvious a clue.

Along the corridor, straight for Number Six moved Mrs. Stiffson, Bindle in close attendance, fearful lest he should lose the dramatic intensity of the arrival of "the wronged wife."

Unconscious that Nemesis was marching upon him, Mr. Stiffson, stimulated by the coffee, bacon and eggs, and the gay insouciance of Cissie Boye, was finding the situation losing much of its terror for him.

No man for long could remain indifferent to the charming personality of Cissie Boye. Her bright chatter and good looks, her innocence, strangely blended with worldly wisdom, her daring garb; all combined to divert Mr. Stiffson's mind from the thoughts of his wife, apart from which the clock pointed to five minutes past nine, and Mrs. Stiffson was as punctual as fate.

Had he possessed the intuition of a mongoose, Mr. Stiffson would have known that there was a snake in his grass.

Instinct guiding her steps, Mrs. Stiffson entered the flat. Instead of turning to the right, in the direction of the bedroom in which Oscar was overdoing the thanksgiving business for bird-seed and water, she wheeled to the left and threw open the sitting-room door.

From under Mrs. Stiffson's right arm Bindle saw the tableau. Mr. Stiffson, who was facing the door, was in the act of raising his coffee-cup to smiling lips. Cissie Boye, sitting at right angles on his left, was leaning back in her chair clapping her hands.

"Oh, you naughty old thing!" she was crying.

At the sight of his wife, Mr. Stiffson's jaw dropped and the coffee-cup slipped from his nerveless hands. It struck the edge of the table and emptied its contents down the opening of his low-cut waistcoat.

At the sight of the abject terror on Mr. Stiffson's face, Cissie Boye ceased to clap her hands and, turning her head, met Mrs. Stiffson's uncompromising stare and Bindle's appreciative grin.

"Jabez!" It was like the uninflected accents of doom.

Mr. Stiffson shivered; that was the only indication he gave of having heard. With unblinking eyes he continued to gaze at his wife as if fascinated, the empty coffee-cup resting on his knees.

"Jabez!" repeated Mrs. Stiffson. "I thought I told you to wear your tweed mixture to-day."

Mrs. Stiffson had a fine sense of the dramatic! The unexpectedness of the remark caused Mr. Stiffson to blink his eyes like a puzzled owl, without however removing them from his wife, or changing their expression.

Cissie Boye laughed, Bindle grinned.

"Won't you sit down?" It was Cissie Boye who spoke.

"Silence, hussy!" There was no anger in Mrs. Stiffson's voice; it was just a command and an expression of opinion.

Cissie Boye rose, the light of battle in her eyes. Bindle pushed past Mrs. Stiffson and stood between the two women.

"Look 'ere, mum," he said, "we likes manners in this 'ere flat, an' we're a-goin' to 'ave 'em, see! Sorry if I 'urt your feelin's. This ain't a woman's club."

"Hold your tongue, fool!" the deep voice thundered.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said Bindle cheerfully, looking up at his mountainous antagonist. "You can't frighten me, I ain't married to you. Now you jest be civil."

"Listen!" cried Cissie Boye with flashing eyes. "Don't you go giving me the bird like that, or——" She paused at a loss with what to threaten her guest.

"It's all right, miss," said Bindle, "You jest leave 'er to me; I got one o' my own at 'ome. She's going to speak to me, she is."

Mrs. Stiffson's efforts of self-control were proving unequal to the occasion, her breathing became laboured and her voice husky.

"What is my husband doing in this person's flat?" demanded Mrs. Stiffson, apparently of no one in particular. There was something like emotion in her voice.

"Well, mum," responded Bindle, "'e was eatin' bacon an' eggs an' drinking coffee."

"How dare you appear before my husband like that!" Mrs. Stiffson turned fiercely upon Cissie Boye. "You brazen creature!" anger was now taking possession of her.

"Here, easy on, old thing!" said Cissie Boye, seeing Mrs. Stiffson's rising temper, and entirely regaining her own good humour.

"I repeat," said Mrs. Stiffson, "what is my husband doing in your company?"

"Ask him what he's doing in my flat," countered Cissie Boye triumphantly.

"Look 'ere, mum," broke in Bindle in a soothing voice, "it's no use a-playin' 'Amlet in a rage. You jest sit down and talk it over friendly like, an' p'raps I can get a drop of Royal Richard from old Sedgy. It's sort of been a shock to you, mum, I can see. Well, things do look bad; anyhow, Royal Richard'll bring you round in two ticks."

Mrs. Stiffson turned upon Bindle a look that was meant to annihilate.

Bindle glanced across at Mr. Stiffson, who was mechanically rubbing the middle of his person with a napkin, his eyes still fixed upon his wife.

"Because your 'usband gets into the wrong duds," continued Bindle, "ain't no reason why you should get into an 'owling temper, is it?"

There was a knock at the door and, without waiting for a reply, Mrs. Sedge entered, wearing a canvas apron and a crape bonnet on one side and emitting an almost overpowering aroma of Royal Richard. In her hands she carried a large bowl of porridge. Marching across to the table, she dumped it down in front of Mr. Stiffson.

"Ain't that jest like a man, forgettin' 'alf o' wot 'e ought to remember!" she remarked and, without waiting for a reply, she stumped out of the room, banging the door behind her.

Bindle sniffed the air like a hound.

"That's Royal Richard wot you can smell, mum," he explained.

Cissie Boye laughed.

Ignoring the interruption, Mrs. Stiffson returned to the attack.

"I demand an explanation!" Her voice shook with suppressed fury.

"Listen!" cried Cissie Boye, "if your boy will come and sleep in my flat——"

"Sleep in your flat!" cried Mrs. Stiffson in something between a roar and a scream. "Sleep in your flat!" She turned upon her husband. "Jabez, did you hear that? Oh! you villain, you liar, you monster!"

"But—but, my dear," protested Mr. Stiffson, becoming articulate, "Oscar was here all the time."

Cissie Boye giggled.

"So that is why you have put on your best clothes, you deceiver, you viper, you scum!"

"Steady on, mum!" broke out Bindle. "'E ain't big enough to be all them things; besides, if you starts a-megaphonin' like that, you'll 'ave all the other bunnies a-runnin' in to see wot's 'appened, an' if you was to 'ear Number Seven's language, an' see wot Queenie calls 'er face, Mr. S. might be a widower before 'e knew it."

"Where did you meet this person?" demanded Mrs. Stiffson of her husband, who, now that the coffee was cooling, began to feel chilly, and was busily engaged in trying to extract the moisture from his garments.

"Where did you meet her?" repeated his wife.

"In—in the bath-room," responded Mr. Stiffson weakly.

Mrs. Stiffson gasped and stood speechless with amazement.

"I heard a splashing," broke in Cissie Boye, "and I peeped in,—I only just peeped in, really and really."

"An' then we 'ad a little friendly chat in the 'all," explained Bindle, "an' after breakfast we was goin' to talk things over, an' see 'ow we could manage so that you didn't know."

"Your bath-room!" roared Mrs. Stiffson at length, the true horror of the situation at last seeming to dawn upon her. "My husband in your bath-room! Jabez!" she turned on Mr. Stiffson once more like a raging fury. "You heard! were you in this creature's bath-room?"

Mr. Stiffson paused in the process of endeavouring to extract coffee from his exterior.

"Er—er——" he began.

"Answer me!" shouted Mrs. Stiffson. "Were you or were you not in this person's bath-room?"

"Yes—er—but——" began Mr. Stiffson.

Mrs. Stiffson cast a frenzied glance round the room. Action had become necessary, violence imperative. Her roving eye lighted on the bowl full of half-cold porridge that Mrs. Sedge had just brought in. She seized it and, with a swift

inverting movement, crashed it down upon her husband's head.

With the scream of a wounded animal, Mr. Stiffson half rose, then sank back again in his chair, his hands clutching convulsively at the basin fixed firmly upon his head by the suction of its contents. From beneath the rim the porridge gathered in large pendulous drops, and slowly lowered themselves upon various portions of Mr. Stiffson's person, leaving a thin filmy thread behind, as if reluctant to cut off all communication with the basin.

Bindle and Cissie Boye went to the victim's assistance, and Bindle removed the basin. It parted from Mr. Stiffson's head with a juicy sob of reluctance. Whilst his rescuers were occupied in their samaritan efforts, Mrs. Stiffson was engaged in describing her husband's character.

Beginning with a request for someone to end his poisonous existence, she proceeded to explain his place, or rather lack of place, in the universe. She traced the coarseness of his associates to the vileness of his ancestors. She enquired why he had not been to the front (Mr. Stiffson was over fifty years of age), why he was not in the volunteers. Then slightly elevating her head she demanded of Heaven why he was permitted to live. She traced all degradation, including that of the lower animals, to the example of such men as her husband. He was the breaker-up of homes, in some way or other connected with the increased death-rate and infant mortality, the indirect cause of the Income Tax and directly responsible for the war; she even hinted that he was to some extent answerable for the defection of Russia from the Allied cause.

Whilst she was haranguing, Bindle and Cissie Boye, with the aid of desert spoons, were endeavouring to remove the porridge from Mr. Stiffson's head. It had collected behind his spectacles, forming a succulent pad before each eye.

Bindle listened to Mrs. Stiffson's tirade with frank admiration; language always appealed to him.

"Ain't she a corker!" he whispered to Cissie Boye.

"Cork's out now, any old how," was the whispered reply.

Then Mrs. Stiffson did a very feminine thing. She gave vent to three short, sharp snaps of staccatoed laughter, and suddenly collapsed upon the sofa in screaming hysterics.

Cissie Boye made a movement towards her. Bindle laid an arresting hand upon

her arm.

"You jest leave 'er be, miss," he said. "I know all about them little games. She'll come to all right."

"Where the hell is that damn porter?" the voice of Number Seven burst in upon them from the outer corridor.

"'Ere I am, sir," sang out Bindle.

"Then why the corruption aren't you in your room?" bawled Number Seven.

Bindle slipped quickly out into the corridor to find Number Seven bristling with rage.

"Because Ole Damn an' 'Op it, I can't be in two places at once," he said.

Whilst Bindle was engaged with Number Seven, Mrs. Stiffson had once more galvanised herself to action. Still screaming and laughing by turn, she wheeled out of the flat with incredible rapidity and made towards the lift.

"Hi! stop 'er, stop 'er!" shouted Bindle, bolting after Mrs. Stiffson, followed by Number Seven.

"Police, police, murder, murder!" screamed Mrs. Stiffson. She reached the lift and, with an agility that would have been creditable in a young goat, slipped in and shut the gates with a clang. Just as Bindle arrived the lift began slowly to descend. In a fury of impatience, Mrs. Stiffson began banging at the buttons, with the result that the lift stopped halfway between the two floors.

Bindle and Number Seven shouted down instructions; but without avail. The lift had stuck fast. Mrs. Stiffson shrieked for help, shrieked for the police, and shrieked for vengeance.

"Damned old tiger-cat!" cried Number Seven. "Leave her where she is."

Bindle turned upon him a face radiating smiles.

"Them's the best words I've 'eard from you yet, sir"; and he walked upstairs to reassure the occupants of Number Six that fate and the lift had joined the Entente against Mrs. Stiffson.

It was four hours before Mrs. Stiffson was free; but Mr. Stiffson, his luggage, his thermos flask and Oscar had fled. Cissie Boye was at rehearsal and Bindle had

donned his uniform. It was a chastened Mrs. Stiffson who wheeled out of the lift and enquired for her husband, and it was a stern and official Bindle who told her that Mr. Stiffson had gone, and warned her that any further attempt at disturbing the cloistral peace of Fulham Square Mansions would end in a prosecution for disorderly conduct.

And Mrs. Stiffson departed in search of her husband.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAMOUFLAGING OF MR. GUPPERDUCK

I

"Ah!" cried Bindle as he pushed open one of the swing doors of the public bar of The Yellow Ostrich. "I thought I should find my little sunflower 'ere," and he grasped the hand that Ginger did not extend to him. Demonstration was not Ginger's strong point.

The members of the informal club that used to meet each Friday night at The Scarlet Horse had become very uncertain in their attendance, and the consequent diminution in the consumption of liquor had caused the landlord to withdraw the concession of a private-room.

Bindle had accepted the situation philosophically; but Ruddy Bill had shown temper. In the public bar he had told the landlord what he thought of him, finishing up a really inspired piece of decorated rhetoric with "Yus, it's The Scarlet 'Orse all right; but there's a ruddy donkey behind the bar," and with that he had marched out.

From that date Bindle's leisure moments had been mostly spent in the bar of The Yellow Ostrich. It was here that Ginger, when free from his military duties, would seek Bindle and the two or three congenial spirits that gathered round him. Wilkes would cough, Huggles grin, and Ginger spit vindictive disapproval of everyone and everything, whilst "Ole Joe told the tale."

"There are times," remarked Bindle, when he had taken a long pull at his tankard, "when I feel I could almost thank Gawd for not bein' religious." He paused to light his pipe.

Ginger murmured something that might have been taken either as an interrogation or a protest.

"I jest been 'avin' a stroll on Putney 'Eath," continued Bindle, settling himself down comfortably in the corner of a bench. "I likes to give the gals a treat now an' then, and who d'you think I saw there?" He paused impressively, Ginger

shook his head, Huggles grinned and Wilkes coughed, Wilkes was always coughing.

"Clever lot o' coves you are," said Bindle as he regarded the three. "Grand talkers, ain't you. Well, well! to get on with the story.

"There was a big crowd, makin' an 'ell of a row, they was, an' there in the middle was a cove talkin' an' wavin' 'is arms like flappers. So up I goes, thinkin' 'e was sellin' somethink to prove that you 'aven't got a liver, an' who should it turn out to be but my lodger, Ole Guppy."

"Wot was 'e doin'?" gasped Wilkes between two paroxysms.

"Well," continued Bindle, "at that particular moment I got up, 'e was talkin' about wot a fine lot o' chaps them 'Uns is, an' wot an awful lot of Aunt Maudies we was. Sort o' 'urt 'is feelin's, it did to know 'e was an Englishman when 'e might 'ave been an 'Un. 'E was jest a-sayin' somethink about Mr. Llewellyn John, when 'e' disappears sudden-like, and then there was a rare ole scrap.

"When the police got 'im out, Lord, 'e was a sight! Never thought ten minutes could change a cove so, and that, Ginger, all comes about through being a Christian and talkin' about peace to people wot don't want peace."

"We all want peace." Ginger stuck out his chin aggressively.

"Ginger!" there was reproach in Bindle's voice, "an' you a soldier too, I'm surprised at you!"

"I want this ruddy war to end," growled Ginger. "I don't 'old wiv war," he added as an after-thought.

"Now wot does it matter to you, Ging, whether you're a-carrin' a pack or a piano on your back?"

"Why don't they make peace?" burst out Ginger irrelevantly.

"Oh, Ginger, Ginger! when shall I teach you that the only way to stop a fight is to sit on the other cove's chest: an' we ain't sittin' on Germany's chest yet. Got it?"

"But they're willing to make peace," growled Ginger. "I don't 'old wiv 'angin' back."

"Now you jest listen to me. Why didn't you make peace last week with Pincher Nobbs instead o' fightin' 'im?"

"'E's a ruddy tyke, 'e is," snarled Ginger.

"Well," remarked Bindle, "you can call the Germans ruddy tykes. Pleasant way you got o' puttin' things, 'aven't you, Ging? No; ole son, this 'ere war ain't a-goin' to end till you got the V.C., that's wot we're 'oldin' out for."

"They could make peace if they liked," persisted Ginger.

"You won't get Llewellyn John to give in, Ging," said Bindle confidently. "'E's 'ot stuff, 'e is."

"Yus!" growled Ginger savagely. "All 'e's got to do is to stay at 'ome an' read about wot us chaps are doin' out there."

"Now ain't you a regular ole yellow-'eaded 'Uggins," remarked Bindle with conviction, as he gazed fixedly at Ginger, whose eyes shifted about restlessly. "Why, 'e's always at work, 'e is. Don't even 'ave 'is dinner-hour, 'e don't."

"Wot!" Ginger's incredulity gave expression to his features. "No dinner-hour?"

"No; nor breakfast-time neither," continued Bindle. "There's always a lot o' coves 'angin' round a-wantin' to talk about the war an' wot to do next. When 'e's shavin' Haig'll ring 'im up, 'im a-standin' with the lather on, makin' 'is chin 'itch."

Ginger banged down his pewter on the counter and ordered another.

"Then sometimes, when 'e's gettin' up in the mornin', George Five'll nip round for a jaw, and o' course kings can go anywhere, an' you mustn't keep 'em waitin'. So up 'e goes, an' there's L.J. a-talkin' to 'imself as 'e tries to get into 'is collar, an' George Five a-'elpin' to find 'is collar-stud when 'e drops it an' it rolls under the chest o' drawers."

Ginger continued to gaze at Bindle with surprise stamped on his freckled face.

"You got a kid's job to 'is, Ging," continued Bindle, warming to his subject. "If Llewellyn John 'ops round the corner for a drink an' to 'ave a look at the papers, they're after 'im in two ticks. Why 'e's 'ad to give up 'is 'ot bath on Saturday nights because 'e was always catchin' cold through nippin' out into the 'all to answer the telephone, 'im in only a smile an' 'is whiskers."

Ginger spat, indecision marking the act.

"Works like a blackleg, 'e does, an' all 'e gets is blackguardin'. No," added Bindle solemnly, "don't you never change jobs with 'im, Ging, it 'ud kill you, it would really."

"I don't 'old wiv war," grumbled Ginger, falling back upon his main line of defence. "Look at the price of beer!" He gazed moodily into the depths of his empty pewter.

"Funny cove you are, Ging," said Bindle pleasantly.

Ginger spat viciously, missing the spittoon by inches.

"There ain't no pleasin' you," continued Bindle, digging into the bowl of his pipe with a match stick. "You ain't willin' to die for your country, an' you don't seem to want to live for the twins."

"Wot's the use o' twins?" demanded Ginger savagely. "Now if they'd been goats ——"

"Goats!" queried Bindle.

"Sell the milk," was Ginger's laconic explanation.

"They might 'ave been billy-goats," suggested Bindle.

Ginger swore.

"Well, well!" remarked Bindle, as he rose, "you ain't never goin' to be 'appy in this world, Ging, an' as to the next—who knows! Now I must be orf to tell Mrs. B. wot they been a-doin' to 'er lodger. S'long!"

And he went out whistling "I'd Never Kissed a Soldier Till the War."

II

"Where's Mr. Gupperduck?"

There was anxious alarm in Mrs. Bindle's interrogation.

"Well," responded Bindle, as he nodded to Mr. Hearty and waved his hand to Mrs. Hearty, "I can't rightly say. 'E may be 'appy with an 'arp in 'eaven, or 'e may

be a-groanin' in an 'ospital with a poultice where 'is face ought to be. Where's Millikins?" he demanded, looking round.

"She's with her Aunt Rose," wheezed Mrs. Hearty.

"What has happened, Joseph?" faltered Mr. Hearty.

"Well, it ain't altogether easy to say," responded Bindle with aggravating deliberation. "It ought to 'ave been a peace-meetin', accordin' to plan; but some'ow or other things sort o' got mixed. I ain't seen a scrap like it since that little bust-up in the country when the lemonade went wrong."

Bindle paused and proceeded to refill his pipe, determined to keep Mr. Hearty and Mrs. Bindle on tenter-hooks.

"Where is he now?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"Can't say!" Bindle sucked at his pipe, holding a lighted match well down over the bowl. "I see 'im bein' taken orf on a stretcher, an' wot 'e was wearin' wouldn't 'ave made a bathin' suit for an 'Ottentot."

"Did they kill 'im, Joe?" wheezed Mrs. Hearty.

"You can't kill coves like Guppy, Martha," was Bindle's response. "'E's got more lives than a rate-collector."

"What happened, Joseph?" said Mr. Hearty. "I had meant to go to that meeting myself." Mr. Hearty made the statement as if Providence had interposed with the deliberate object of saving his life.

"Lucky for you, 'Earty, that you didn't," remarked Bindle significantly. "You ain't no good at scrappin'. Well, I'll tell you wot 'appened. Guppy seems to 'ave said a little too much about the 'Uns, an' wot fine fellers they was, an' it sort o' give them people wot was listenin' the pip, so they goes for Guppy."

"The cowards!" Mrs. Bindle snapped out the words venomously.

"You got to remember, Lizzie," said Bindle with unwonted seriousness, "that a lot o' those people 'ad lost them wot they was fond of through this 'ere war, an' they wasn't keen to 'ear that the 'Un is a sort o' picture-postcard, with a dove a-sittin' on 'is 'elmet."

"What did you do?" demanded Mrs. Bindle aggressively.

"Well, I jest looked on," said Bindle calmly. "I've warned Guppy more'n once that 'e'd lose 'is tail-feathers if 'e wasn't careful; but 'e was that self-willed, 'e was. You can't throw 'Un-wash over crowds in this 'ere country without runnin' risks." Bindle spoke with conviction.

"But it's a free country, Joseph," protested Mr. Hearty rather weakly.

"Oh! 'Earty, 'Earty!" said Bindle, wagging his head despondently. "When will you learn that no one ain't free to say to a cove things wot make 'im wild, leastwise without bein' ready to put 'is 'ands up."

"But weren't any of his friends there?" enquired Mrs. Bindle.

"I see two of 'em," said Bindle with a reminiscent grin. "They caught Ole Cap-an'-Whiskers jest as 'e was shinnin' up a tree—rare cove for trees 'e seems. 'Auled 'im down they did. Then 'e swore 'e'd never seen ole Guppy in all 'is puff, cried about it, 'e did."

"Peter!" muttered Mrs. Bindle.

"That 'is name?" enquired Bindle. "Any'ow it didn't 'elp 'im, for they pulled 'is whiskers out and dipped 'im in the pond, an' when last I see 'im 'e was wearin' jest a big bruise, a soft collar an' such bits of 'is trousers as the boys didn't seem to want. Made me blush it did."

"Serve him right!" cried Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle looked at her curiously. "Thought you was sort o' pals with 'im," he remarked.

"He was a traitor, a Peter betraying his master." Bindle looked puzzled, Mr. Hearty nodded his head in approval.

"Was Mr. Wayskin there?" asked Mrs. Bindle.

"The little chap with the glasses an' a beard too big for 'im, wot goes about with Ole Cap-an'-Whiskers?"

Mrs. Bindle nodded.

"Well, 'e got orf, trousers an' all," said Bindle with a grin. "Nippy little cove 'e was," he added.

"Oh, the brutes!" exclaimed Mrs. Bindle. "The cowards!"

"Well," remarked Bindle, "it all come about through 'im tryin' to give 'em treacle when they wanted curry."

"Perhaps he's gone home!" Mrs. Bindle half rose as the thought struck her.

"Who, Guppy?" interrogated Bindle.

"Yes, Mr. Gupperduck," said Mrs. Bindle eagerly.

"Guppy ain't never comin' back to my place," Bindle announced with decision.

"Where's he to sleep then?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"Well," remarked Bindle judicially, "by wot I last see of 'im, 'e ain't goin' to sleep much anywhere for some time"; and he again launched into a harrowing description of Mr. Gupperduck's plight when the police rescued him from the crowd.

"I'll nurse him!" announced Mrs. Bindle with the air of a Martha.

"You won't do no such thing, Mrs. B."

Even Mrs. Hearty looked at Bindle, arrested by the unwonted determination in his voice. "You jest remember this, Mrs. B.," continued Bindle, "if ever I catches Mr. Josiah Gupperduck, or any other cove wot loves Germans as if they was 'ymns or beer, round my place, things'll 'appen. Wot they done to 'im on the 'Eath won't be nothink to wot I'll do to 'im in Fenton Street."

"You're a brute, Bindle!" was Mrs. Bindle's comment.

"That may be; but you jest get 'is duds packed up, *includin'* Wheezy Willie, an' give 'em to 'im when 'e calls. I ain't goin' to 'ave no German spies round my back-yard. I ain't got no money to put in tanks," Bindle added, "but I still got a fist to knock down a cove wot talks about peace." Bindle rose and yawned. "Now I'm orf. Comin', Mrs. B.?" he enquired.

"No, I'm not. I want to talk to Mr. Hearty," said Mrs. Bindle angrily.

"Well, s'long, all!" and Bindle went out, leaving Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty to mourn over the fallen Hector.

A minute later the door half opened and Bindle thrust his head round the corner. "Don't forget, Mrs. B.," he said with a grin, "if I see Guppy in Fenton Street, I'll

camelflage 'im, I will;" and with that he was gone.

"I suppose," he remarked meditatively as he walked across Putney Bridge, "wot 'appened to-night is wot Guppy 'ud call 'the peace wot passes all understandin'."'

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAGEDY OF GIUSEPPI ANTONIO TOLMENICINO

"'Ullo, Scratcher!" cried Bindle as the swing doors of The Yellow Ostrich were pushed open, giving entrance to a small lantern-jawed man, with fishy eyes and a chin obviously intended for a face three sizes larger. "Fancy meetin' you! Wot 'ave you been doin'?"

Bindle was engaged in fetching the Sunday dinner-beer according to the time-honoured custom.

Scratcher looked moodily at the barman, ordered a glass of beer and turned to Bindle.

"I changed my job," he remarked mysteriously.

"Wot jer doin'?" enquired Bindle, intimating to the barman by a nod that his pewter was to be refilled.

"Waiter," responded Scratcher.

"Waiter!" cried Bindle, regarding him with astonishment.

"Yus; at Napolini's in Regent Street;" and Scratcher replaced his glass upon the counter and, with a dexterous upward blow, scattered to the winds the froth that bedewed his upper lip.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Bindle, finding solace in his refilled tankard. "But don't you 'ave to be a foreigner to be a waiter? Don't you 'ave to speak through your nose or somethink?"

"Noooo!" In Scratcher's voice was the contempt of superior knowledge. "Them furriners 'ave all gone to the war, or most of 'em," he added, "an' so we get a look-in."

"Wot d'you do?" enquired Bindle.

"Oh! we jest take orders, an' serves the grub, an' makes out the bills, an' gets tips. I made four pound last week, all but twelve shillings," he added.

"Well, I'm blowed!" said Bindle.

"Then," proceeded Scratcher, warming to his subject, "they often leaves somethin' in the bottles. Last night Ole Grandpa got so squiffy, 'e cried about 'is mother, 'e did."

"An' didn't it cost 'im anything?" enquired Ginger, who had been an interested listener.

"Not a copper," said Scratcher impressively, "not a brass farden."

"I wish this ruddy war was over," growled Ginger. "Four pound a week, and a free drunk. Blast the war! I say, I don't 'old wiv killin'."

"Then," continued Scratcher, "you can always get a bellyful. There's——"

"'Old 'ard, Scratcher," interrupted Bindle. "Wot place is it you're talkin' about?"

"Napolini's," replied Scratcher, looking at Bindle reproachfully.

"Go on, ole sport; it's all right," said Bindle resignedly. "I thought you might 'ave got mixed up with 'eaven."

"When you takes a stoo," continued Scratcher, "you can always pick out a bit o' meat with your fingers—if it ain't too 'ot," he added, as if not wishing to exaggerate. "An' when it's whitebait, you can pinch some when no one's lookin'. As for potatoes, you can 'ave all you can eat, and soup,—well, it's there."

Scratcher's tone implied that Napolini's was literally running with soup and potatoes.

"Don't go on, Scratcher," said Bindle mournfully; "see wot you're a-doin' to pore Ole Ging."

"Then there's macaroni," continued Scratcher relentlessly, "them bein' I-talians. Long strings o' white stuff, there ain't much taste; but it fills up." Scratcher paused, then added reflectively, "You got to be careful wi' macaroni, or it'll get down your collar; it's that slippery."

"I suppose ole Nap ain't wantin' anyone to 'elp mop up all them things?" enquired Bindle wistfully.

Scratcher looked at Bindle interrogatingly.

"D'you think you could find your ole pal a job at Nap's?" enquired Bindle.

"You come down to-morrow mornin' about eleven," said Scratcher with the air of one conferring a great favour. "Three of our chaps was sacked a-Saturday for fightin'."

"Well, I must be movin'," said Bindle, as he picked up the blue and white jug with the crimson butterfly. "You'll see me round at Nap's at eleven to-morrow, Scratcher, as empty as a drum;" and with a "s'long," Bindle passed out of The Yellow Ostrich.

"Nice time you've kept me waiting!" snapped Mrs. Bindle, as Bindle entered the kitchen.

"Sorry!" was Bindle's reply as he hung up his hat behind the kitchen-door.

"Another time I shan't wait," remarked Mrs. Bindle, as she banged a vegetable dish on the table.

Bindle became busily engaged upon roast shoulder of mutton, greens and potatoes.

After some time he remarked, "I been after a job."

"You lorst your job again, then?" cried Mrs. Bindle in accusing tones. "Somethin' told me you had."

"Well, I ain't," retorted Bindle; "but I 'eard o' somethink better, so on Monday I'm orf after a job wot'll be better'n 'Earty's 'eaven."

Bindle declined further to satisfy Mrs. Bindle's curiosity.

"You wait an' see, Mrs. B., you jest wait an' see."

II

On the following morning Bindle was duly enrolled as a waiter at Napolini's. He soon discovered that, whatever the privileges and perquisites of the fully-experienced waiter, the part of the novice was one of thorns rather than of roses. He was attached as assistant to a diminutive Italian, with a fierce upward-brushed moustache. Bindle had not been three minutes under his direction before he precipitated a crisis that almost ended in open warfare.

"Wot's your name, ole son?" he enquired. "Mine's Bindle—Joseph Bindle."

"Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino," replied the Italian with astonishing rapidity.

"Is it really?" remarked Bindle, examining his chief with interest, as he proceeded deftly to lay a table. "Sounds like a machine-gun, don't it?" Then after a pause he remarked quite innocently, "Look 'ere, ole sport, I'll call you Kayser."

In a flash Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino turned upon Bindle, his moustache bristling like the spines of a wild-boar, and from his lips poured a passionate stream of Southern invective.

Unable to understand a word of the burning phrases of reproach that eddied and flowed about him, Bindle merely stared. There was a patter of feet from all parts of the long dining-room, and soon he was the centre of an angry crowd of excited gesticulating waiters, with Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino screaming his fury in the centre.

"Hi!" called Bindle to Scratcher, who appeared through the service-door, just as matters seemed about to break into open violence. "'Ere! Scratcher, wot's up? Call 'im orf."

"Wot did you call 'im, Joe?" enquired Scratcher, pushing his way through the crowd.

"I asked 'is name, an' then 'e went off like the 'mad minute,' so I said I'd call 'im 'Kayser,' because of 'is whiskers."

At the repetition of the obnoxious word, Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino shook his fist in Bindle's face, and screamed more hysterically than ever. He was white to the lips, at the corners of his mouth two little points of white foam had collected, and his eyes blinked with the rapidity of a cinematograph film.

With the aid of three other waiters, Scratcher succeeded in restoring peace. Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino's fortissimo reproaches were reduced to piano murmurs by the explanation that Bindle meant no harm, added to which Bindle apologised.

"Look 'ere," he said, genuinely regretful at the effect of his remark, "'ow was I to know that you was that sensitive, you lookin' so fierce too."

The arrival of one of the superintendents put an end to the dispute; but it was

obvious that Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino nourished in his heart a deep resentment against Bindle for his unintentioned insult.

"Fancy 'im takin' on like that," muttered Bindle, as he strove to adjust a white tablecloth so that it hung in equal folds on all sides of the table. "Funny things foreigners, as 'uffy as birds, they are." Turning to Scratcher, who was passing at the moment, he enquired, "Wot the 'ell am I a-goin' to call 'im?"

"Call who?" enquired Scratcher, his mouth full of something.

Bindle looked about warily. "Ole Kayser," he whispered. "'E's that sensitive. Explodes if you looks at 'im, 'e does."

Scratcher worked hard to reduce the contents of his mouth to conversational proportions.

"I can't never remember 'is name," continued Bindle. "Went off like a rattle it did."

"Don't know 'is name myself," said Scratcher after a gigantic swallow. "'E's new."

"Wouldn't 'elp you much, ole son, if you did know it," said Bindle with conviction. "Seemed to me like a patent gargle. Never 'eard anythink like it."

"'Ere!" said Bindle to Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino, who was darting past on his way to another table. The Italian paused, hatred smouldering in his dark eyes.

"I can't remember that name o' yours, ole sport," said Bindle. "Sorry, but I ain't a gramophone. Wot 'ave I got to call you?"

"Call me sair," replied Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino with dignity.

"Call you wot?" cried Bindle indignantly. "Call you wot?"

"Call me sair," repeated the Italian.

"Me call a foreigner 'sir!'" cried Bindle. "Now ain't you the funniest ole 'Uggins."

Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino cast upon Bindle a look of consuming hatred.

"Look 'ere," remarked Bindle cheerfully, "if you goes about a-lookin' like that, you'll spoil the good impression them whiskers make."

Murder flashed in the eyes of the Italian, as he ground out a paralysing oath in his own tongue.

"There's a-goin' to be trouble between me an' ole 'Okey-Pokey. Pleasant sort o' cove to 'ave about the 'ouse."

Customers began to drift in, and soon Bindle was kept busy fetching and carrying for Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino, who by every means in his power strove to give expression to the hatred of Bindle that was burning in his soul.

At the end of the first day,—it was in reality the early hours of the next morning,—as Bindle with Scratcher walked from Napolini's to the Tube, he remarked, "Well, I ain't 'ungry, though I could drink a deal more; still I says nothink about that; but as for tips, well, ole 'Okey-Pokey's pocketed every bloomin' penny. When I asked him to divvy up fair, 'e started that machine-gun in 'is tummy, rolled 'is eyes, an' seemed to be tryin' to tell me wot a great likin' 'e'd taken to me. One o' these days somethink's goin' to 'appen to 'im," added Bindle prophetically. "'E ain't no sport, any'ow."

"Wot's 'e done?" enquired Scratcher.

"I offered to fight 'im for the tips, an' all 'e did was to turn on 'is rattle;" and Bindle winked at the girl-conductor, who clanged the train-gates behind him.

For nearly a week Bindle continued to work thirteen hours a day, satisfying the hunger of others and quenching alien thirsts. Thanks to judicious hints from Scratcher, at the same time he found means of ministering to his own requirements. He tasted new and strange foods; but of all his discoveries in the realm of dietetics, curried prawns held pride of place. More than one customer looked anxiously into the dark brown liquid, curious as to what had become of the blunt-pointed crescents; but, disliking the fuss attending complaint, he ascribed the reduction in their number to the activities of the Food Controller.

When, as occasionally happened in the absence of his chief, Bindle came into direct contact with a customer and received an order, he invariably found himself utterly at a loss.

"Bouillabaisse de Marseilles, pommes sautées," called out one customer. Bindle, who was hurrying past, came to a dead stop and regarded him with interest.

"D'you mind sayin' that again, sir," he remarked.

"Bouillabaisse de Marseilles, pommes sautées," repeated the customer.

"Well, I'm blowed!" was Bindle's comment.

The customer stared, but before he had time to reply Bindle was unceremoniously pushed aside by Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino, who, pad in hand, bent over the customer with servile intentness.

"Wot did 'e mean? Was 'e tellin' me 'is name?" enquired Bindle of a lath-like youth, with frizzy hair and a face incapable of expressing anything beyond a meaningless grin. It was Scratcher, however, who told the puzzled Bindle that the customer had been ordering lunch and not divulging his identity.

"Bullybase de Marsales pumsortay is things to eat, Joe," he explained; "you got to learn the mane-yu."

"Well, I'm blowed!" was Bindle's sole comment. "Fancy people eatin' things with names like that." He followed Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino towards the "service" regions in response to an imperious motion of his dark, well-greased head.

When Bindle returned to the dining-room, after listening to the unintelligible rebukes of his immediate superior, he found himself beckoned to the side of the customer whose wants he had found himself unable to comprehend.

"New to this job?" he enquired.

"You've 'it it, sir," was Bindle's reply. "New *as* new. I'm in the furniture-movin' line myself; but Scratcher told me this 'ere was a soft job, an' so I took it on. 'E didn't happen to mention 'Okey-Pokey 'owever."

"Hokey-Pokey!" interrogated the guest.

"That chap with 'is whiskers growin' up 'is nose," explained Bindle. "All prickles 'e is. Can't say anythink without 'urtin' 'is feelin's. Never come across such a cove."

Later, when the customer left, it was to Bindle and not to Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino that he gave his tip. This precipitated a crisis. Once out of the dining-room the Italian demanded of Bindle the money.

"You shall 'ave 'alf, ole son," said Bindle magnanimously. "if you forks out 'alf of wot you've 'ad given you, see?" Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino did not see. His

eyes snapped, his moustache bristled, his sallow features took on a shade of grey and, discarding English, he launched into a torrent of words in his own tongue.

Bindle stood regarding his antagonist much as he would a juggler, or quick-change artist. His good-humoured calm seemed to goad Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino to madness. With a sudden movement he seized a bottle from another waiter and, brandishing it above his head, rushed at Bindle.

Bindle stepped swiftly aside; but in doing so managed to place his right foot across Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino's path. The Italian lurched forward, bringing down the bottle with paralysing force upon the shoulder of another waiter, who, heavily laden, was making towards the dining-room.

The assaulted waiter screamed, Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino rolled on the floor, and the assaulted waiter's burden fell with a crash on top of him. The man who had been struck hopped about the room holding his shoulder, his shirt-front dyed a deep red with the wine that had flowed over it.

"Never see such a mess in all my puff," said Bindle in describing the scene afterwards. "Pore ole 'Okey-Pokey comes down on 'is back and a lot o' tomato soup falls on 'is 'ead. Then a dish o' whitebait gets on top of that, so 'e 'as soup and fish any'ow. Funny thing to see them little fishes sticking out o' the red soup. 'E got an 'erring down 'is collar, and a dish of macaroni in 'is ear, an' all 'is clothes was covered with different things. An 'ole bloomin' mane-yu, 'e was. 'Oly Angels! but 'e was a sight."

For a moment Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino lay inert, then he slowly sat up and looked about him, mechanically picking whitebait out of his hair, and removing a crème caramel from the inside of his waistcoat.

Suddenly his eyes lighted on Bindle.

In an instant he was on his feet and, with head down and arms waving like flails, he rushed at his enemy.

At that moment the door leading into the dining-room was opened and, attracted by the hubbub, Mr. James Smith, who before the war had been known as Herr Siegesmann, the chief superintendent, entered. He was a heavy man of ponderous proportions, with Dundreary whiskers and a pompous manner. His entrance brought him directly into the line of Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino's attack. Before he could take in the situation, the Italian's head, covered with

tomato soup and bristling with whitebait, caught him full in the centre of his person, and he went down with a sobbing grunt, the Italian on top of him.

The shock released a considerable portion of the food adhering to Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino on to the chief superintendent. Whitebait forsook the ebon locks of the waiter and dived into the magnificent Dundrearys of Herr Smith, and on his shirt-front was the impression of Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino's features in tomato soup.

Without a moment's hesitation Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino was on his feet once more; but Bindle, feeling that the time had arrived for action, was equally quick. Taking him from behind by the collar he worked his right arm up as high as it would go behind his back. The Italian screamed with the pain; but Bindle held fast.

"You ain't safe to be trusted about, ole sport," he remarked, "an' I got to 'old you, until Ole Whiskers decides wot's goin' to be done. You'll get six months for wastin' food like this. Why, you looks like a bloomin' restaurant. Look at 'im!" Bindle gazed down at the prostrate superintendent. "Knocked 'is wind out, you 'ave. Struck 'im bang in the solar-plexus, blowed if you didn't!"

With rolling eyes and foaming mouth Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino screamed his maledictions. A group of waiters was bending over Herr Smith. One was administering brandy, another was plucking whitebait out of his whiskers, a third was trying to wipe the tomato soup from his shirt-front, an operation which transformed a red archipelago into a flaming continent.

When eventually the superintendent sat up, he looked like a whiskered robin redbreast. He gazed from one to the other of the waiters engaged upon his renovation. Then his eye fell upon Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino. He uttered the one significant British word.

"Berlice!"

When Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino left Napolini's that evening, it was in the charge of two policemen, with two more following to be prepared for eventualities. Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino was what is known professionally as "violent." Not satisfied with the food that was plastered upon his person, he endeavoured by means of his teeth to detach a portion of the right thigh of Police-constable Higgins, and with his feet to raise bruises where he could on the persons of his captors.

"Pore ole 'Okey-Pokey!" remarked Bindle, as he returned to the dining-room, where he had now been allotted two tables, for which he was to be entirely responsible. "Pore ole 'Okey-Pokey. I'm afraid I got 'is goat; but didn't 'e make a mess of Ole Whiskers!"

Herr Smith had gone home. When a man is sixty years of age and, furthermore, when he has been a superintendent of a restaurant for upwards of twenty-five years, he cannot with impunity be rammed in the solar-plexus by a hard-headed and vigorous Italian.

While Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino in a cell at Vine Street Police Station was forecasting the downfall of the Allies by the secession of Italy from the Entente, Bindle was striving to satisfy the demands of the two sets of customers that sat at his tables. He made mistakes, errors of commission and omission; but his obviously genuine desire to satisfy everybody inclined people to be indulgent.

The man who was waiting for pancakes received with a smile half-a-dozen oysters; whilst another customer was bewildered at finding himself expected to commence his meal with pancakes and jam. When such errors were pointed out, Bindle would scratch his head in perplexity, then, as light dawned upon him, he would break out into a grin, make a dive for the pancakes and quickly exchange them for the oysters.

The names of the various dishes he found almost beyond him and, to overcome the difficulty, he asked the customers to point out on the menu what they required. Then again he found himself expected to carry a multiplicity of plates and dishes.

At first he endeavoured to emulate his confrères. On one occasion he set out from the dining-room with three dishes containing respectively "caille en casserole," a Welsh rarebit, and a steak and fried potatoes. The steak and fried potatoes were for a lady of ample proportions with an almost alarmingly low-cut blouse. In placing the steak and metal dish of potatoes before her, Bindle's eye for a second left the other two plates, which began to tilt.

The proprietor of the large-bosomed lady was, with the aid of a fish-knife, able to hold in place the Welsh rarebit; but he was too late in his endeavour to reach the under-plate on which reposed the "caille en casserole," which suddenly made a dive for the apex of the V of the lady's blouse.

As she felt the hot, moist bird touch her, she gave a shriek and started back.

Bindle also started, and the lady's possessor lost his grip on the Welsh rarebit, which slid off the plate on to his lap.

Greatly concerned, Bindle placed the empty Welsh rarebit plate quickly on the table and, seizing a fork, stabbed the errant and romantic quail, replacing it upon its plate. He then went to the assistance of the gentleman who had received the Welsh rarebit face downwards on his lap.

With great care Bindle returned it to the plate, with the exception of such portions as clung affectionately to the customer's person.

To confound confusion the superintendent dashed up full of apologies for the customers and threatening looks for the cause of the mishap. Bindle turned to the lady, who was hysterically dabbing her chest with a napkin.

"I 'ope you ain't 'urt, mum," he said with genuine solicitude; "I didn't see where 'e was goin', slippery little devil!" and Bindle regarded the bird reproachfully. Then remembering that another was waiting for it, he crossed over to the table at which sat the customer who had ordered "caille en casserole" and placed the plate before him.

The man looked up in surprise.

"You'd better take that away," he said. "That bird's a bit too enterprising for me."

"A bit too wot, sir?" interrogated Bindle, lifting the plate to his nose. "I don't smell it, sir," he added seriously.

"I ordered 'caille en casserole,'" responded the man. "You bring me 'caille en cocotte.'"

"D'you mind saying that in English, sir?" asked Bindle, wholly at sea.

At that moment he was pushed aside by the owner of the lady of generous proportions. Thrusting his face forward until it almost touched that of the "caille" guest, he launched out into a volley of reproaches.

"Mon Dieu!" he shouted, "you have insulted that lady. You are a scoundrel, a wretch, a traducer of fair women;" and he went on in French to describe the customer's ancestry and possible progeny.

Throughout the dining-room the guests rose to see what was happening. Many came to the scene of the mishap. By almost superhuman efforts and an apology

from the customer who had ordered "caille en casserole," peace was restored and, at a motion from the superintendent, Bindle carried the offending bird to the kitchen to exchange it for another, a simple process that was achieved by having it re-heated and returned on a clean plate.

"This 'ere all comes about through these coves wantin' foreign food," muttered Bindle to himself. "If they'd all 'ave a cut from the joint and two veges, it 'ud be jest as simple as drinkin' beer. An' ain't they touchy too," he continued. "Can't say a word to 'em, but what they flies up and wants to scratch each other's eyes out."

Tranquillity restored, Bindle continued his ministrations. For half an hour everything went quietly until two customers ordered ginger beer, one electing to drink it neat, and the other in conjunction with a double gin. Bindle managed to confuse the two glasses. The customer who had been forced to break his pledge was greatly distressed, and much official tact on the part of a superintendent was required to soothe his injured feelings.

"Seems to me," muttered Bindle, "that I gets all the crocks. If there's anythink funny about, it comes and sits down at one o' my tables. Right-o, sir, comin'!" he called to an impatient customer, who, accompanied by a girl clothed principally in white boots, rouge and peroxide, had seated himself at the table just vacated by a couple from the suburbs.

The man ordered a generous meal, including a bottle of champagne. Bindle attentively wrote down a phonetic version of the customer's requirements. The wine offered no difficulty, it was numbered.

Bindle had observed that wine was frequently carried to customers in a white metal receptacle, sometimes containing hot water, at others powdered ice. No one had told him of the different treatment accorded to red and white wines. Desirous of giving as little trouble as possible to his fellows, he determined on this occasion to act on his own initiative. Obtaining a wine-cooler, he had it filled with hot water and, placing the bottle of champagne in it, hurried back to the customer.

Placing the wine-cooler on a service-table, he left it for a few minutes, whilst he laid covers for the new arrivals.

The lady thirstily demanded the wine. Bindle lifted it from its receptacle, wound a napkin round it as he had seen others do and, nippers in hand, carried it to the table.

He cut the wires. Suddenly about half a dozen different things seemed to happen at the same moment. The cork leapt joyously from the neck of the bottle and, careering across the room, caught the edge of the monocle of a diner and planted it in the soup of another at the next table, just as he was bending down to take a spoonful. The liquid sprayed his face. He looked up surprised, not having seen the cause. He who had lost the monocle began searching about in a short-sighted manner for his lost property.

The cork, continuing on its way, took full in the right eye a customer of gigantic proportions. He dropped his knife and fork and roared with pain. Bindle watched the course of the cork in amazement, holding the bottle as a fireman does the nozzle of a hose. From the neck squirted a stream of white foam, catching the lady of the white boots, rouge and peroxide full in the face. She screamed.

"You damn fool!" yelled the man to Bindle.

In his amazement Bindle turned suddenly to see from what quarter this rebuke had come, and the wine caught the man just beneath the chin. Never had champagne behaved so in the whole history of Napolini's. A superintendent rushed up and, with marvellous presence of mind, seized a napkin and stopped the stream. Then he snatched the bottle from Bindle's hands, at the same time

calling down curses upon his head for his stupidity.

The lady in white boots, rouge and peroxide was gasping and dabbing her face with a napkin, which was now a study in pink and white. Her escort was feeling the limpness of his collar and endeavouring to detach his shirt from his chest. The gentleman who had lost his monocle was explaining to the owner of the soup what had happened, and asking permission to fish for the missing crystal that was lying somewhere in the depths of the stranger's mulligatawny.

Bindle was gazing from one to the other in astonishment. "Fancy champagne be'avin' like that," he muttered. "Might 'ave been a stone-ginger in 'ot weather."

At that moment the superintendent discovered the wine-cooler full of hot water. One passionate question he levelled at Bindle, who nodded cheerfully in reply. Yes, it was he who had put the champagne bottle in hot water.

This sealed Bindle's fate as a waiter. Determined not to allow him out of his sight again, the superintendent haled him off to the manager's room, there to be formally discharged.

"Ah! this is the man," said the manager to an inspector of police with whom he was engaged in conversation as Bindle and the superintendent entered.

The inspector took a note-book from his pocket.

"What is your name and address?" he asked of Bindle.

Bindle gave the necessary details, adding, "I'm a special, Fulham District. Wot's up?"

"You will be wanted at Marlborough Street Police Court to-morrow at ten with regard to"—he referred to his note-book—"a charge against Giuseppi Antonio Tolmenicino," said the inspector.

"Wot's 'e goin' to be charged with, assault an' battery?" enquired Bindle curiously.

"Under the Defence of the Realm Act," replied the inspector. "Documents were found on him."

Bindle whistled. "Well, I'm blowed! A spy! I never did trust them sort o' whiskers," he muttered as he left the manager's room.

Five minutes later he left Napolini's for ever, whistling at the stretch of his powers "So the Lodger Pawned His Second Pair of Boots."

CHAPTER XIII

THE RETURN OF CHARLIE DIXON

"Oh, Uncle Joe! Charlie's back, and he's going to take us out to-night, and I'm so happy."

Bindle regarded the flushed and radiant face of Millie Hearty, who had just rushed up to him and now stood holding on to his arm with both hands.

"I thought I should catch you as you were going home," she cried. "Uncle Joe, I —I think I want to cry."

"Well," remarked Bindle, "if you'll give your pore ole uncle a chance to get a word in edgeways, 'e'd like to ask why you wants to cry."

"Because I'm so happy," cried Millie, dancing along beside him, her hands still clasping his arm.

"I see," replied Bindle drily; "still, it's a funny sort o' reason for wantin' to cry, Millikins;" and he squeezed against his side the arm she had now slipped through his.

"You will come, Uncle Joe, won't you?" There was eager entreaty in her voice. "We shall be at Putney Bridge at seven."

"I'm afraid I can't to-night, Millikins," replied Bindle. "I got a job on."

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" The disappointment in Millie's voice was too obvious to need the confirmation of the sudden downward droop of the corners of her pretty mouth. "You *must* come;" and Bindle saw a hint of tears in the moisture that gathered in her eyes.

He coughed and blew his nose vigorously before replying.

"You young love-birds won't miss me," he remarked rather lamely.

"But we shan't go unless you do," said Millie with an air of decision that was sweet to Bindle's ears, "and I've been so looking forward to it. Oh, Uncle Joe! can't you really manage it just to please *meeee*?"

Bindle looked into the pleading face turned eagerly towards him, at the parted lips ready to smile, or to pout their disappointment and, in a flash, he realised the blank in his own life.

"P'raps 'is Nibs might like to 'ave you all to 'imself for once," he suggested tentatively. "There ain't much chance with a gal for another cove when your Uncle Joe's about."

Millie laughed. "Why, it was Charlie who sent me to ask you, and to say if you couldn't come to-night we would put it off. Oh! do come, Uncle Joe. Charlie's going to take us to dinner at the Universal Café, and they've got a band, and, oh! it will be lovely just having you two."

"Well!" began Bindle, but discovering a slight huskiness in his voice he coughed again loudly. "Seem to 'ave caught cold," he muttered, then added, "Of course I might be able to put that job orf."

"But don't you want to come, Uncle Joe?" asked Millie, anxiety in her voice.

"Want to come!" repeated Bindle. "Of course I want to come; but, well, I wanted to be sure you wasn't jest askin' me because you thought it 'ud please your ole uncle," he concluded somewhat lamely.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" cried Millie, "how could you think anything so dreadful. Why, wasn't it you who gave me Charlie?"

Bindle looked curiously at her. He was always discovering in his niece naïve little touches that betokened the dawn of womanhood.

"Ain't we becomin' a woman, Millikins!" he cried, whereat Millie blushed.

"Thank you so much for promising to come," she cried. "Seven o'clock at Putney Bridge Station. Don't be late, and don't forget," she cried and, with a nod and a smile, she was gone.

Bindle watched her neat little figure as she tripped away. At the corner she turned and waved her hand to him, then disappeared.

"Now I don't remember promisin' nothink," he muttered. "Ain't that jest Millikins all over, a-twistin' 'er pore ole uncle round 'er little finger. Fancy 'Earty 'avin' a gal like that." He turned in the direction of Fenton Street. "It's like an old 'en 'avin' a canary. Funny place 'eaven," he remarked, shaking his head dolefully.

"They may make marriages there, but they make bloomers as well."

At five minutes to seven Bindle was at Putney Bridge Station.

"Makes me feel like five pound a week," he murmured, looking down at his well-cut blue suit, terminating in patent boots, the result of his historical visit to Lord Windover's tailor. "A pair o' yellow gloves and an 'ard 'at 'ud make a dook out of a drain-man. Ullo, general!" he cried as Sergeant Charles Dixon entered the station with a more than ever radiant Millie clinging to his arm.

"'Ere, steady now, young feller," cautioned Bindle as he hesitatingly extended his hand. "No pinchin'!"

Charlie Dixon laughed. The heartiness of his grip was notorious among his friends.

"I'm far too glad to see you to want to hurt you, Uncle Joe," he said.

"Uncle Joe!" exclaimed Bindle in surprise, "Uncle Joe!"

"I told him to, Uncle Joe," explained Millie. "You see," she added with a wise air of possession, "you belong to us both now."

"Wot-o!" remarked Bindle. "Goin'-goin' gone, an' cheap at 'alf the price. 'Ere, no you don't!" By a dexterous dive he anticipated Charlie Dixon's move towards the ticket-window. A moment later he returned with three white tickets.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" cried Millie in awe, "you've booked first-class."

"We're a first-class party to-night, ain't we, Charlie?" was Bindle's only comment.

As the two lovers walked up the stairs leading to the up-platform, Bindle found it difficult to recognise in Sergeant Charles Dixon the youth Millie had introduced to him two years previously at the cinema.

"Wonder wot 'Earty thinks of 'im now?" muttered Bindle. "Filled out, 'e 'as. Wonderful wot the army can do for a feller," he continued, regretfully thinking of the "various veins" that had debarred him from the life of a soldier.

"Well, Millikins!" he cried, as they stood waiting for the train, "an' wot d'you think of 'is Nibs?"

"I think he's lovely, Uncle Joe!" said Millie, blushing and nestling closer to her

lover.

"Not much chance for your ole uncle now, eh?" There was a note of simulated regret in Bindle's voice.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" she cried, releasing Charlie Dixon's arm to clasp with both hands that of Bindle. "Oh, Uncle Joe!" There was entreaty in her look and distress in her voice. "You don't think that, do you, *reeeeeally*!"

Bindle's reassurances were interrupted by the arrival of the train. Millie became very silent, as if awed by the unaccustomed splendour of travelling in a first-class compartment with a first-class ticket. She had with her the two heroes of her Valhalla and, woman-like, she was content to worship in silence. As Bindle and Charlie Dixon discussed the war, she glanced from one to the other, then with a slight contraction of her eyes, she sighed her happiness.

To Millie Hearty the world that evening had become transformed into a place of roses and of honey. If life held a thorn, she was not conscious of it. For her there was no yesterday, and there would be no to-morrow.

"My! ain't we a little mouse!" cried Bindle as they passed down the moving-stairway at Earl's Court.

"Oh, Uncle Joe, I'm so happy!" she cried, giving his arm that affectionate squeeze with both her hands that never failed to thrill him. "Please go on talking to Charlie; I love to hear you—and think."

"Now I wonder wot she's thinkin' about?" Bindle muttered. "Right-o, Millikins!" he said aloud. "You got two young men to-night, an' you needn't be afraid of 'em scrappin'."

As they entered the Universal Café, with its brilliant lights and gaily chattering groups of diners Millie caught her breath. To her it seemed a Nirvana. Brought up in the narrow circle of Mr. Hearty's theological limitations, she saw in the long dining-room a gilded-palace of sin against which Mr. Hearty pronounced his anathemas. As they stood waiting for a vacant table, she gazed about her eagerly. How wonderful it would be to eat whilst a band was playing—and playing such music! It made her want to dance.

Many glances of admiration were cast at the young girl who, with flushed cheeks and parted lips, was drinking in a scene which, to them, was as familiar as their own finger-nails.

When at last a table was obtained, due to the zeal of a susceptible young superintendent, and she heard Charlie Dixon order the three-and-sixpenny dinner for all, she seemed to have reached the pinnacle of wonder; but when Charlie Dixon demanded the wine-list and ordered a bottle of "Number 68," the pinnacle broke into a thousand scintillating flashes of light.

She was ignorant of the fact that Charlie was as blissfully unaware as she of what "Number 68" was, and that he was praying fervently that it would prove to be something drinkable. Some wines were abominably sour.

"I've ordered the dinner; I suppose that'll do," he remarked with a man-of-the-world air.

Millie smiled her acquiescence. Bindle, not to be outdone in savoir-faire, picked up the menu and regarded it with wrinkled brow.

"Well, Charlie," he remarked at length, "it's beyond me. I s'pose it's all right; but it might be the German for cat an' dog for all I know. I 'opes," he added anxiously, "there ain't none o' them long white sticks with green tops, wot's always tryin' to kiss their tails. Them things does me."

"Asparagus," cried Millie, proud of her knowledge, "I love it."

"I ain't nothink against it," said Bindle, recalling his experience at Oxford, "if they didn't expect you to suck it like a sugar stick. You wants a mouth as big as a dustbin, if you're a-goin' to catch the end."

When the wine arrived Charlie Dixon breathed a sigh of relief, as he recognised in its foam and amber an old friend with which he had become acquainted in France.

"Oh! what is it?" cried Millie, clasping her hands in excitement.

"Champagne!" said Charlie Dixon.

"Oh, Charlie!" cried Millie, gazing at her lover in proud wonder. "Isn't it—isn't it most awfully expensive?"

Charlie Dixon laughed. Bindle looked at him quizzically.

"Ain't 'e a knockout?" he cried. "Might be a dook a-orderin' champagne as if it was lemonade, or a 'aporth an' a pen'orth."

"But ought I to drink it, Uncle Joe?" questioned Millie doubtfully, looking at the bubbles rising through the amber liquid.

"If you wants to be temperance you didn't ought to——"

"I don't, Uncle Joe," interrupted Millie eagerly; "but father——"

"That ain't nothink to do with it," replied Bindle. "You're grown up now, Millikins, an' you got to decide things for yourself."

And Millie Hearty drank champagne for the first time.

When coffee arrived, Charlie Dixon, who had been singularly quiet during the meal, exploded his mine. It came about as the result of Bindle's enquiry as to how long his leave would last.

"Ten days," he replied, "and—and I want——" He paused hesitatingly.

"Out with it, young feller," demanded Bindle. "Wot is it that you wants?"

"I want Millie to marry me before I go back." The words came out with a rush.

Millie looked at Charlie Dixon, wide-eyed with astonishment; then, as she realised what it really was he asked, the blood flamed to her cheeks and she cast down her eyes.

"Oh! but I couldn't, Charlie. Father wouldn't let me, and—and——"

Bindle looked at Charlie Dixon.

"Millie, you will, won't you, dear?" said Charlie Dixon. "I've got to go back in ten days, and—and——"

"Oh, Charlie, I—I——" began Millie, then her voice broke.

"Look 'ere, you kids," broke in Bindle. "It ain't no good you two settin' a-stutterin' there like a couple of machine-guns; you know right enough that you both want to get married, that you was made for each other, that you been lying awake o' nights wonderin' when you'd 'ave the pluck to tell each other so, and 'ere you are——" He broke off. "Now look 'ere, Millikins, do you want to marry Charlie Dixon?"

Millie's wide-open eyes contracted into a smile.

"Yes, Uncle Joe, please," she answered demurely.

"Now, Charlie, do you want to marry Millikins?" demanded Bindle.

"Ra*ther*," responded Charlie Dixon with alacrity.

"Then wot d'you want to make all this bloomin' fuss about?" demanded Bindle.

"But—but it's so little time," protested Millie, blushing.

"So much the better," said Bindle practically. "You can't change your minds. You see, Millikins, if you wait too long, Charlie may meet someone 'e likes better, or you may see a cove wot takes your fancy more."

The lovers exchanged glances and meaning smiles.

"Oh, yes! I understand all about that," said Bindle knowingly. "You're very clever, ain't you, you two kids? You know everythink there is to be known about weddin's, an' lovin' and all the rest of it. Now look 'ere, Millikins, are you goin' to send this 'ere boy back to France un'appy?"

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" quavered Millie.

"Well, you say you want to marry 'im, and 'e wants to marry you. If you don't marry 'im before 'e goes back to the front, 'e'll be un'appy, won't you, Charlie?"

"It will be rotten," said Charlie Dixon with conviction.

"There you are, Millikins. 'Ow's 'e goin' to beat the Kayser if 'e's miserable? Now it's up against you to beat the Kayser by marryin' Charlie Dixon. Are you goin' to do it, or are you not?"

They both laughed. Bindle was irresistible to them.

"It's a question of patriotism. If you can't buy War Bonds, marry Charlie Dixon, and do the ole Kayser in."

"But father, Uncle Joe?" protested Millie. "What will he say?"

"'Earty," responded Bindle with conviction, "will say about all the most unpleasant and uncomfortable things wot any man can think of; but you leave 'im to me."

There was a grim note in his voice, which caused Charlie Dixon to look at him

curiously.

"I ain't been your daddy's brother-in-law for nineteen years without knowing 'ow to manage 'im, Millikins," Bindle continued. "Now you be a good gal and go 'ome and ask 'im if you can marry Charlie Dixon at once."

"Oh! but I can't, Uncle Joe," Millie protested; "I simply can't. Father can be ——" She broke off.

"Very well then," remarked Bindle resignedly, "the Germans'll beat us."

Millie smiled in spite of herself.

"I'll—I'll try, Uncle Joe," she conceded.

"Now look 'ere, Millikins, you goes 'ome to-night and you says to that 'appy-'earted ole dad o' yours 'Father, I'm goin' to marry Charlie Dixon next Toosday,' or whatever day you fix. 'E'll say you ain't goin' to do no such thing." Millie nodded her head in agreement. "Well," continued Bindle, "wot you'll say is, 'I won't marry no one else, an' I'm goin' to marry Charlie Dixon.' Then you jest nips round to Fenton Street an' leaves the rest to me. If you two kids ain't married on the day wot you fix on, then I'll eat my 'at,—yes, the one I'm wearin' an' the concertina-'at I got at 'ome; eat 'em both I will!"

Millie and Charlie Dixon looked at Bindle admiringly.

"You are wonderful, Uncle Joe!" she said. Then turning to Charlie Dixon she asked, "What should we have done, Charlie, if we hadn't had Uncle Joe?"

Charlie Dixon shook his head. The question was beyond him.

"We shall never be able to thank you, Uncle Joe," said Millie.

"You'll thank me by bein' jest as 'appy as you know 'ow; and if ever you wants to scrap, you'll kiss and make it up. Ain't that right, Charlie?"

Charlie Dixon nodded his head violently. He was too busily occupied gazing into Millie's eyes to pay much attention to the question asked him.

"Oh, you are a darling, Uncle Joe!" said Millie. Then with a sigh she added, "I wish I could give every girl an Uncle Joe."

"Well, now we must be orf, 'ere's the band a-goin' 'ome, and they'll be puttin' the lights out soon," said Bindle, as Charlie Dixon called for his bill.

As they said good night at Earl's Court Station, Charlie Dixon going on to Hammersmith, Millie whispered to him, "It's been such a wonderful evening, Charlie dear;" then rather dreamily she added, "The most wonderful evening I've ever known. Good-bye, darling; I'll write to-morrow."

"And you will, Millie?" enquired Charlie Dixon eagerly.

She turned away towards the incoming Putney train, then looking over her shoulder nodded her head shyly, and ran forward to join Bindle, who was standing at the entrance of a first-class carriage.

As she entered the carriage Bindle stepped back to Charlie Dixon.

"You jest make all your plans, young feller," he said. "Let me know the day an' she'll be there."

Charlie Dixon gripped Bindle's hand. Bindle winced and drew up one leg in obvious pain at the heartiness of the young lover's grasp.

"There are times, young feller, when I wish I was your enemy," he said as he gazed ruefully at his knuckles. "Your friendship 'urts like 'ell."

CHAPTER XIV

MR. HEARTY YIELDS

"Gawd started makin' a man, an' then, sort o' losin' interest, 'E made 'Earty. That's wot I think o' your brother-in-law, Mrs. B."

Mrs. Bindle paused in the operation of lifting an iron from the stove and holding its face to her cheek to judge as to its degree of heat. There was a note of contemptuous disgust in Bindle's voice that was new to her.

"You always was jealous of him," she remarked, rubbing a piece of soap on the face of the iron and polishing it vigorously upon a small square of well-worn carpet kept for that purpose. "'E's got on and you haven't, and there's an end of it;" and she brought down the iron fiercely upon a pillow-case.

"Wot d'you think 'e's done now?" demanded Bindle, as he went to the sink and filled a basin for his evening "rinse." Plunging his face into the water, with much puffing and blowing he began to lather it with soapy hands. He had apparently entirely forgotten his question.

"Well, what is it?" enquired Mrs. Bindle at length, too curious longer to remain quiet.

Bindle turned from the sink, soap-suds forming a rim round his face and filling his tightly-shut eyes. He groped with hands extended towards the door behind which hung the roller-towel. Having polished his face to his entire satisfaction, he walked towards the door leading into the passage.

"Well, what's he done now?" demanded Mrs. Bindle again with asperity.

"'E says Millikins ain't goin' to marry Charlie Dixon." There was anger in Bindle's voice.

"You're a nice one," commented Mrs. Bindle, "Always sneerin' at marriage, an' now you're blaming Mr. Hearty because he won't——"

"Well, I'm blowed!" Bindle wheeled round, his good-humour re-asserting itself, "I 'adn't thought o' that."

Having cleared away her ironing, Mrs. Bindle threw the white tablecloth over the table with an angry flourish.

"Now ain't that funny!" continued Bindle, as if highly amused at Mrs. Bindle's discovery. "Now ain't that funny!" he repeated.

"Seems to amuse you," she retorted acidly.

"It does, Mrs. B.; you've jest 'it it. One o' the funniest things I ever come across. 'Ere's me a-tellin' everybody about this chamber of 'orrors wot we call marriage, an' blest if I ain't a-tryin' to shove poor ole Charlie Dixon in an' shut the door on 'im." Bindle grinned expansively.

"Supper'll be ready in five minutes," said Mrs. Bindle with indrawn lips.

"Right-o!" cried Bindle as he made for the door. "I'm goin' to get into my uniform before I 'ops around to see 'Earty. It's wonderful wot a bit o' blue cloth and a peak cap'll do with a cove like 'Earty, specially when I 'appens to be inside. Yes! Mrs. B.," he repeated as he opened the door, "you're right; it does amuse me," and he closed the door softly behind him. Mrs. Bindle expressed her thoughts upon the long-suffering table-appointments.

When Bindle returned in his uniform, supper was ready. For some time the meal proceeded in silence.

"Funny thing," he remarked at length, "I can swallow most things from stewed-steak to 'alf-cooked 'ymns, but 'Earty jest sticks in my gizzard."

"You're jealous, that's what you are," remarked Mrs. Bindle with conviction.

"A man wot could be jealous of 'Earty." said Bindle, "ain't safe to be let out, only on a chain. Why don't 'e try an' bring a little 'appiness down 'ere instead o' sayin' it's all in 'eaven, with you an' 'im a-sittin' on the lid. Makes life like an 'addock wot's been rejooced in price, it does."

"What are you goin' to say to Mr. Hearty?" enquired Mrs. Bindle suspiciously.

"Well," remarked Bindle, "that depends rather on wot 'Earty's goin' to say to me."

"You've no right to interfere in his affairs."

"You're quite right, Mrs. B.," remarked Bindle, "that's wot makes it so pleasant. I

'aven't no right to punch 'Earty's 'ead; but one of these days I know I shall do it. Never see an 'ead in all my life wot looked so invitin' as 'Earty's. Seems to be crying-out to be punched, it does."

"You didn't ought to go round upsetting him," said Mrs. Bindle aggressively. "He's got enough troubles."

"'E's goin' to 'ave another to-night, Mrs. B.; an' if 'e ain't careful, 'e'll probably 'ave another to-morrow night."

Mrs. Bindle banged the lid on a dish.

"You ain't against them kids a-gettin' married, are you?" Bindle demanded. "You used to be sort of fond of Millikins."

"No! I'm not against it; but I'm not goin' to interfere in Mr. Hearty's affairs," said Mrs. Bindle virtuously.

"Well, I *am*," said Bindle grimly, as he rose and reached for his cap. A moment later he left the room, whistling cheerily.

At the Heartys' house Millie opened the door.

"Oh, Uncle Joe!" she cried, "I wondered whether you would come."

"Course I'd come, Millikins," said Bindle. "Now you jest run and tell your father that I want to 'ave a little talk with 'im in the drawing-room, then you'll turn on the light an' be'ave as if I was a real lemonade-swell."

Millie smiled tremulously and led the way upstairs. Ushering Bindle into the drawing-room, she switched on the light and went out, gently closing the door behind her.

Five minutes later Mr. Hearty entered. From the movement of his fingers, it was obvious that he was ill at ease.

"'Ullo, 'Earty!" said Bindle genially.

"Good evening, Joseph," responded Mr. Hearty.

"Trade good?" enquired Bindle conversationally.

"Quite good, thank you, Joseph," was the response.

"Goin' to open any more shops?" was the next question.

Mr. Hearty shook his head.

Bindle sucked contentedly at his pipe.

"Won't you sit down, 'Earty?" he asked solicitously.

Mr. Hearty sat down mechanically, then, a moment later, rose to his feet.

"Now, 'Earty," said Bindle, "you and me are goin' to 'ave a little talk about Millikins."

Mr. Hearty stiffened visibly.

"I—I don't understand," he said.

"You jest wait a minute, 'Earty, an' you'll understand a rare lot. Now are you, or are you not, goin' to let them kids get married?"

"Most emphatically not," said Mr. Hearty with decision. "Millie is too young; she's not twenty yet."

"Now ain't you jest tiresome, 'Earty. 'Ere 'ave I been arrangin' for the weddin' for next Toosday, and you go and say it ain't comin' orf; you should 'ave told me this before."

"But Millie only asked me this morning," protested Mr. Hearty, whose literalness always placed him at a disadvantage with Bindle.

"Did she really?" remarked Bindle. "Dear me! an' she knew she was goin' to get married last night. Never could understand women," he remarked, shaking his head hopelessly.

Mr. Hearty was at a loss. He had been prepared for unpleasantness; but this geniality on the part of his brother-in-law he found disarming.

"I have been forced to tell you before, Joseph," he said with some asperity, "that I cannot permit you to interfere in my private affairs."

"Quite right, 'Earty," agreed Bindle genially, "quite right, you said it in them very words." Bindle's imperturbability caused Mr. Hearty to look at him anxiously.

"Then why do you come here to-night and—and——?" He broke off nervously.

"I was always like that, 'Earty. Never seemed able to take no for an answer. Now wot are you goin' to give 'em for a weddin'-breakfast?" he enquired. "An' 'ave we got to bring our own meat-tickets?"

"I have just told you, Joseph," remarked Mr. Hearty angrily, "that they are not going to be married."

"Now ain't that a pity," remarked Bindle, as, having re-filled his pipe, he proceeded to light it. "Now ain't that a pity. I been and fixed it all up with Charlie Dixon, and now 'ere are you a-upsettin' of my plans. I don't like my plans upset, 'Earty; I don't really."

Mr. Hearty looked at Bindle in amazement. This was to him a new Bindle. He had been prepared for anything but this attitude, which seemed to take everything for granted.

"I shouldn't make it a big weddin', 'Earty. There ain't time for that, and jest a nice pleasant little weddin'-breakfast. A cake, of course; you must 'ave a cake. No woman don't feel she's married without a cake. She'd sooner 'ave a cake than an 'usband."

"I tell you, Joseph, that I shall not allow Millie to marry this young man on Tuesday. I am very busy and I must——"

"I shouldn't go, 'Earty, if I was you. I shouldn't really; I should jest stop 'ere and listen to wot I 'ave to say."

"I have been very patient with you for some years past, Joseph," began Mr. Hearty, "and I must confess——"

"You 'ave, 'Earty," interrupted Bindle quietly, looking at him over a flaming match, "you 'ave. If you wasn't wanted in the greengrocery line, you'd 'ave been on a monument, you're that patient. 'As it ever struck you, 'Earty,"—there was a sterner note in Bindle's voice,—"'as it ever struck you that sometimes coves is patient because they're afraid to knock the other cove down?"

"I refuse to discuss such matters, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty with dignity.

"Well, well, 'Earty! p'raps you're right," responded Bindle. "Least said, soonest mended. So them kids ain't goin' to get married on Toosday, you say," he continued calmly.

"I thought I had made that clear." Mr. Hearty's hands shook with nervousness.

"You 'ave, 'Earty, you 'ave," said Bindle mournfully.

"What right have you to—to interfere in—in such matters?" demanded Mr. Hearty, deliberately endeavouring to work himself up into a state of indignation. "Millie shall marry when I please, and her husband shall be of my choosing."

Bindle looked at Mr. Hearty in surprise. He had never known him so determined.

"You think because you're Martha's brother-in-law,"—Mr. Hearty was meticulously accurate in describing the exact relationship existing between them,—"that gives you a right to—to order me about," he concluded rather lamely.

"Look 'ere, 'Earty!" said Bindle calmly, "if you goes on like that, you'll be ill."

"I have been meaning to speak to you for some time past," continued Mr. Hearty, gaining courage. "Once and for all you must cease to interfere in my affairs, if we are to—to continue—er——"

"Brothers in the Lord," suggested Bindle.

"There is another thing, Joseph," proceeded Mr. Hearty. "I—I have more than a suspicion that you know something about those—that—the——" Mr. Hearty paused.

"Spit it out, 'Earty," said Bindle encouragingly. "There ain't no ladies present."

"If—if there are any more disturbances in—in my neighbourhood," continued Mr. Hearty, "I shall put the matter in the hands of the police. I—I have taken legal advice." As he uttered the last sentence Mr. Hearty looked at Bindle as if expecting him to quail under the implied threat.

"'Ave you really!" was Bindle's sole comment.

"I have a clue!" There was woolly triumph in Mr. Hearty's voice.

"You don't say so!" said Bindle with unruffled calm. "You better see the panel doctor, an' 'ave it taken out."

Mr. Hearty was disappointed at the effect of what he had hoped would prove a bombshell.

"Now, Joseph, I must be going," said Mr. Hearty, "I am very busy." Mr. Hearty

looked about him as if seeking something with which to be busy.

"So Millikins ain't goin' to be allowed to marry Charlie Dixon?" said Bindle with gloomy resignation as he rose.

"Certainly not," said Mr. Hearty. "My mind is made up."

"Nothink wouldn't make you change it, I suppose?" enquired Bindle.

"Nothing, Joseph." There was no trace of indecision in Mr. Hearty's voice now.

"Pore little Millikins!" said Bindle sadly as he moved towards the door, "I done my best. Pore little Millikins!" he repeated as he reached for the door-handle.

Mr. Hearty's spirits rose. He wondered why he had not asserted himself before. He had been very weak, lamentably weak. Still he now knew how to act should further difficulties arise through Bindle's unpardonable interference in his affairs.

Bindle opened the door, then closed it again, as if he had just remembered something. "You was sayin' that you been to your lawyer, 'Earty," he said.

"I have consulted my solicitor." Mr. Hearty looked swiftly at Bindle, at a loss to understand the reason for the question.

"Useful sometimes knowin' a lawyer," remarked Bindle, looking intently into the bowl of his pipe. Suddenly he looked up into Mr. Hearty's face. "You'll be wantin' 'im soon, 'Earty."

"What do you mean?" There was ill-disguised alarm in Mr. Hearty's voice.

"I see an ole pal o' yours yesterday, 'Earty," said Bindle as he opened the door again. "Ratty she was with you. She's goin' to make trouble, I'm afraid. Well, s'long 'Earty! I must be orf;" and Bindle went out into the passage.

"Joseph," called out Mr. Hearty, "I want to speak to you."

Bindle re-entered. Mr. Hearty walked round him and shut the door stealthily.

"What do you mean, Joseph?" There was fear in Mr. Hearty's voice and eyes.

Bindle walked up to him and whispered something in his ear.

"I—I——" Mr. Hearty stuttered and paled. "My God!"

"You see, 'Earty, she told me all about it at the time," said Bindle calmly.

"It's a lie, a damned lie!" shouted Mr. Hearty.

"'Ush, 'Earty, 'ush!" said Bindle gently. "Such language from you! Oh, naughty! 'Earty, naughty!"

"It's a lie, I tell you." Mr. Hearty's voice was almost tearful. "It's a wicked endeavour to ruin me."

"All you got to do, 'Earty," said Bindle, "is to go to ole Six-an'-Eightpence an' 'ave 'er up."

"It's a lie, I tell you," said Mr. Hearty weakly as he sank down upon the couch.

"So you jest said," remarked Bindle calmly. "I thought I better let you know she was goin' up to tell the Ole Bird on the 'Ill. Women is funny things, 'Earty, when you gets their goat. She asked me if I'd mind 'er goin'. Says she wouldn't do anythink I didn't want 'er to, because I was the only one wot stood by 'er. Made a rare fuss, she did, though it wasn't much I done. Well, 'Earty, you're busy, an' I must be orf." Bindle made a movement towards the door.

"Joseph, you must stop her!" Mr. Hearty sprang up, his eyes dilated with fear.

"Me!" exclaimed Bindle in surprise. "It ain't nothink to do with me. You jest been tellin' me I'm always a-buttin' in where I ain't wanted, and now——"

"But—but you must, Joseph," pleaded Mr. Hearty. "If this was to get about, it would ruin me."

"Now ain't you funny, 'Earty," said Bindle. "'Ere are you a-wantin' me to do wot you said 'urt your feelin's."

"If you do this, Joseph, I'll—I'll——"

Bindle looked at Mr. Hearty steadily. "I'll try," he said, "an' now I must be 'oppin'. Toosday I think was the date. I suppose you'll be 'avin' it at the chapel? I'd like to 'ave a word with Millikins before I go. I'll come into the parlour with you, 'Earty."

"You will see——" began Mr. Hearty.

"Right-o!" replied Bindle cheerfully. "You leave it to me."

Mr. Hearty turned meekly and walked downstairs to the parlour, where Mrs. Hearty and Millie were seated.

"It's all right, Millikins, your father says 'e don't object. I persuaded 'im that you're old enough to know your own mind."

Millie jumped up and ran to Bindle.

"Oh, Uncle Joe, you darling!" she cried.

"Yes, ain't I? that's wot all the ladies tell me, Millikins. Makes your Aunt Lizzie so cross, it does."

"'Ullo, Martha!" he cried. "'Ope you got a pretty dress for next Toosday. A weddin', wot'o! Now I must be orf. There's a rare lot o' burglars in Fulham, an' when they 'ears I'm out, Lord! they runs 'ome like bunnies to their 'utches. Good night, 'Earty; cheer-o, Martha! Give us a kiss, Millikins;" and Bindle went out, shown to the door by Millie.

"Oh, Uncle Joe, you're absolutely wonderful! I think you could do anything in the world," she said.

"I wonder," muttered Bindle, as he walked off, "if they'll charge me up with that little fairy tale I told 'Earty."

CHAPTER XV

A BILLETING ADVENTURE

"Some'ow or other, Ginger, I feel I'm goin' to 'ave quite an 'appy day."

Bindle proceeded to light his pipe with the care of a man to whom tobacco means both mother and wife.

"I don't 'old wiv playin' the fool like you do, Joe," grumbled Ginger. "It only gets you the sack."

Bindle and Ginger were seated comfortably on the tail-board of a pantechnicon bearing the famous name of Harridge's Stores. Ginger had a few days' leave, which he was spending in voluntarily helping his mates with their work.

As they rumbled through Putney High Street, Bindle from time to time winked at a girl, or exchanged some remark with a male passer-by.

For the wounded soldiers taking their morning constitutional he had always a pleasant word.

"'Ullo, matey, 'ow goes it?" he would cry.

"Cheerio!" would come back the reply.

"Look at 'em, Ging, without legs an' arms," Bindle cried, "an' laughin' like 'ell. There ain't much wrong with a country wot can breed that sort o' cove."

From the top of the pantechnicon could be heard Wilkes's persistent cough, whilst Huggles was in charge of the "ribbons."

As they reached the foot of Putney Hill, Bindle slipped off the tail-board, calling to Ginger to do likewise and to Wilkes to come down, "to save the 'orses."

"I don't 'old wiv' walkin' to save 'orses," grumbled Ginger. "I'm tired o' bein' on my feet."

"You ain't so tired o' bein' on your feet," remarked Bindle, "as Gawd is of 'earin' o' the things wot you don't 'old with, Ging. Now, orf you come, ole sport!"

Ginger slowly slid off the tail of the van, and Wilkes clambered down from the roof, and two weary horses were conscious of nearly a quarter of a ton less weight to haul up a tiring hill. Bindle was too popular with his mates for them to refuse him so simple a request as walking up a hill.

On Bindle's head was the inevitable cricket cap of alternate triangles of blue and white, which exposure to all sorts of weather had rendered into two shades of grey. He wore his green baize apron, his nose was as cheery and ruddy and his smile as persistent as ever. At the corners of his mouth were those twitches that he seemed unable to control. To Bindle, existence meant opportunity. As he saw it, each new day might be a day of great happenings, of some supreme joke. To him a joke was the anæsthetic which enabled him to undergo the operation of life.

Blessed with a wife to whom religion was the be-all and end-all of existence, he had once remarked to her, after an eloquent exhortation on her part to come on the side of the Lord, "Wot should I do in 'eaven, Lizzie? I never 'eard of an angel wot was able to see a joke, and they'd jest 'oof me out. 'Eaven's a funny place, an' I can't be funny in their way. I got to go on as I was made."

"If you was to smile more, Ginger," remarked Bindle presently, "you'd find that life wouldn't 'urt so much. If you can grin you can bear anythink, even Mrs. B., an' she takes a bit o' bearin'."

As the three men trudged up Putney Hill beside the sweating horses, Bindle beamed, Ginger grumbled, and Wilkes coughed. Wilkes was always coughing. Wilkes found expression in his cough. He could cough laughter, scorn, or anger. As he was always coughing, life would otherwise have been intolerable. He was a man of few words, and, as Bindle phrased it, "When Wilkie ain't coughin', 'e's thinkin'; an' as it 'urts 'im to think, 'e coughs."

Ginger was sincere in his endeavour to discover objects he didn't "'old wiv"; marriage, temperance drinks, Mr. Asquith, twins and women were some of the things that Ginger found it impossible to reconcile with the beneficent decrees of Providence.

After a particularly lengthy bout of coughing on the part of Wilkes, Bindle remarked to Ginger, "Wilkie's cough is about the only thing I never 'eard you say you don't 'old wiv, Ginger."

"'E can't 'elp it," was Ginger's reply.

"No more can't women 'elp twins," Bindle responded.

"I don't 'old wiv twins," was Ginger's gloomy reply. He disliked being reminded of the awful moment when he had been informed that he was twice a father in the first year of his marriage.

"It's a good job Gawd don't ask you for advice, Ginger, or 'E'd be up a tree in about two ticks."

Ginger grumbled some sort of reply.

"It's a funny world, Ging," continued Bindle meditatively. "There's you wot ain't 'appy in your 'ome life, an' there's pore ole Wilkie a-coughin' up 'is accounts all day long." After a few moments devoted to puffing contentedly at his pipe, Bindle continued, "Did you ever 'ear, Ginger, 'ow pore ole Wilkie's cough got 'im into trouble?"

Ginger shook his head mechanically.

"Well," said Bindle, "'e was walkin' out with a gal, an' one evenin' 'e coughed rather 'arder than usual, an' she took it to mean that 'e wanted 'er to marry 'im, an' now there's eighteen little Wilkies. Ain't that true, Wilkie?"

Wilkes stopped coughing to gasp "Twelve."

"Well, well, 'alf a dozen more or less don't much matter, Wilkie, old sport. You lined up to your duty, any'ow."

"Look out for The Poplars, 'Uggles," Bindle called out. "Don't go passin' of it, an' comin' all the way back."

There was a grumble from the front of the van. Two minutes later Huggles swung the horses into the entrance of The Poplars, the London house of Lady Knob-Kerrick, and the pantechnicon rumbled its way up the drive.

Bindle pulled vigorously at both the visitors' and the servants' bells.

"You never knows wot you're expected to be in this world," he remarked. "We ain't servants and we ain't exactly visitors, therefore we pulls both bells, which shows that we're somethink between the two."

Ginger grumbled about not "'oldin'" with something or other, and Huggles clambered stiffly down from the driver's seat.

Presently the door was flung open and a powdered footman, "all plush and calves" as Bindle phrased it, looked superciliously down at the group of men standing before him.

"Mornin', Eustace," said Bindle civilly, "we've come."

John regarded Bindle with a blank expression, but made no response.

"Now then, Calves, 'op it!" said Bindle. "We ain't the War Office, we're in an 'urry. We've brought the bedsteads and the beddin' for the soldiers."

"You've made a mistake, my man," was the footman's response. "We've not ordered any beds for soldiers."

"Now look 'ere, don't be uffy, ole sport," said Bindle cheerily, "or who knows but wot you may get yourself damaged. Like one o' them funny-coloured birds in the Zoo, ain't 'e, Ging?" Then he turned once more to the footman. "My friend 'Uggles 'ere"—Bindle jerked his thumb in the direction of Huggles—"won the middle-weight championship before 'is nose ran away with 'im, an' as for me—well, I'm wot they calls 'the White 'Ope.'"

Bindle made a pugilistic movement forward. John started back suddenly. Producing a paper from his pocket, Bindle read, "'Lady Knob-Kerrick, The Poplars, Putney 'Ill, sixteen bedsteads, beddin', etc.' Is this Lady Knob-Kerrick's, ole son?"

"This is her ladyship's residence," replied John.

"Very well," continued Bindle with finality. "We brought 'er sixteen beds, beddin', etcetera,—there's an 'ell of a lot of etcetera, so you'd better look slippy an' go an' find out all about it if you wants to get orf to see your gal to-night."

The footman looked irresolute.

"Wait here a moment," he said, "and I'll ask Mr. Wilton." He half closed the door, which Bindle pushed open and entered, followed by Wilkes, Ginger and Huggles.

A minute later, the butler, Mr. Wilton, approached.

"What is the meaning of this?" he enquired.

"The meanin' of this, Your Royal 'Ighness, is that we've brought sixteen

bedsteads, beddin', etcetera,—there's an 'ell of a lot of etcetera, as I told Calves, —for to turn the Ole Bird's drawin'-room into billets for soldiers, as per instructions accordin' to this 'ere;" and he held out the delivery-note to Mr. Wilton.

"There must be some mistake," replied the butler pompously, taking the document.

"There ain't no bloomin' mistake on our part. All you got to do is to let Calves show us where the drawin'-room is an' we'll do the rest. 'Ere's the delivery-note, an' when it's in the delivery-note it's so. That's 'Arridges' way. Ain't the Ole Bird told you nothink about it?" he enquired.

Mr. Wilton took the paper and subjected it to a careful scrutiny. He read all the particulars on the delivery-note, then turning it over, read the conditions under which Harridge's did business. After a careful inspection of Bindle, he returned to a study of the paper in his hand.

"John, ask Mrs. Marlings to step here," he ordered the footman. John disappeared swiftly.

"Oh, I forgot," said Bindle. "Got a note for you, I 'ave;" and he drew a letter from his breast-pocket addressed "Mr. Wilton, c/o Lady Knob-Kerrick, The Poplars, Putney Hill, S.W."

With great deliberation Mr. Wilton opened the envelope and unfolded the quarto sheet of notepaper on which was written "By the instructions of Lady Knob-Kerrick, we are sending herewith goods as per delivery-note. It is her Ladyship's wish that these be installed by our men in her drawing-room, which it is her intention to turn into a dormitory for billeting soldiers. Our men will do all the necessary work."

As Mr. Wilton finished reading the note, Mrs. Marlings sailed into the room. She was a woman of generous build, marvellously encased in black silk, with a heavy gold chain round her neck from which hung a cameo locket.

Mr. Wilton handed her the letter in silence. She ferreted about her person for her glasses, which after some trouble she found. Placing them upon her nose she read the communication slowly and deliberately. Having done so she handed it back to Mr. Wilton.

"Her ladyship hasn't said anythink to me about the matter," she said in an

aggrieved tone.

"Nor me either," said Mr. Wilton.

Mrs. Marlings sniffed, as if there was nothing in her mistress not having taken Mr. Wilton into her confidence.

"'Ere, come along, boys!" cried Bindle. "They don't seem to want these 'ere goods. We'd better take 'em back. Keep us 'ere all day at this rate."

This remark seemed to galvanise Mr. Wilton into action.

"You had better do as you have been instructed," he said. This he felt was a master-stroke by which he avoided all responsibility. He could truthfully say that he had not given orders for the bedsteads and bedding to be brought into the house.

From that moment Mr. Wilton's attitude towards the whole business was one of detached superiority, which seemed to say, "Here is a matter about which I have not been consulted. I shall merely await the inevitable catastrophe, which I foresee, and as becomes a man, endeavour to render such assistance as I can in gathering up the pieces."

With great dignity he led the way to the drawing-room on the first floor, followed by Bindle, Ginger and John. Mrs. Marlings disappeared again into the shadows from which she had emerged. Once in the drawing-room, Ginger began to disembarrass himself of his coat, and with incomparable gloom proceeded to roll it up and place it upon the mantelpiece beside the ormolu clock. Mr. Wilton stepped forward quickly.

"Not there, my man," he said.

Ginger looked around with an expression on his face that caused Mr. Wilton instinctively to recoil. It was in reality to Ginger's countenance what to another man would have been a reluctant and fugitive smile. Mr. Wilton, however, interpreted it as a glance of resentment and menace. Seeing his mistake, Bindle stepped immediately into the breach.

"'E's a bit difficult, is Ginger," he said in a loud whisper. "It sort o' 'urts 'im to be called 'my man.' That sensitiveness of 'is 'as made more than one widow. 'E means well, though, does Ginger, 'e jest wants 'andlin' like a wife. P'raps you ain't married yourself, sir."

Mr. Wilton drew himself up, hoping to crush Bindle by the weight of his dignity; but Bindle had turned aside and was proceeding to attend to his duties. Removing his coat he rolled up his shirt-sleeves and walked to the window.

"Better take the stuff in from the top of the van," he remarked. "It'll save Ole Calves from cleanin' the stairs. 'Ere," he called down to Huggles, "back the van up against the window."

Mr. Wilton left the room, indicating to John that he was to stay. Bindle and Ginger then proceeded to pile up the drawing-room furniture in the extreme corner. They wheeled the grand pianoforte across the room, drew from under it the carpet, which was rolled up and placed beneath. Chairs were piled-up on top, Bindle taking great care to place matting beneath in order to save the polish.

At the sound of the van being backed against the house, Bindle went to the window.

"'Ere, wot the 'ell are you doin'?" he cried, looking out. "'Old 'er up, 'old 'er up, you ole 'Uggins! D'you want to go through the bloomin' window? Look wot you done to that tree. That'll do! Steady on, steeeeeeeeady! You didn't ought to 'ave charge o' two goats, 'Uggles, let alone 'orses. 'Ere, come on up!"

Bindle returned to the work of making room for the bedsteads. Suddenly he paused in front of John.

"Yes," he remarked critically, "you look pretty; but I'd love you better if you was a bit more useful. Wot about a drink? I like a slice of lemon in mine; but Ginger'll 'ave a split soda."

Suddenly Huggles' voice was heard from without.

"Hi, Joe!" he cried.

"'Ullo!" responded Bindle, going to the window.

"Where's the ladder?" came Huggles' question.

"Where d'you s'pose it is, 'Uggles? Why, in Wilkie's waistcoat pocket o' course;" and Bindle left it at that.

Just as Huggles' head appeared above the window, Mr. Wilton re-entered.

"I have telephoned to Harridges," he said. "Her ladyship's instructions are quite

clear, there seems to be no mistake."

"There ain't no mistake, ole sport," said Bindle confidently. "It's all down in the delivery-note. The Ole Bird 'as sort o' taken a fancy to soldiers, an' wants to 'ave a supply on the premises."

Huggles had climbed in through the window and was being followed by Wilkes. Suddenly Bindle went up to Mr. Wilton and, in a confidential voice said, jerking his thumb in the direction of John:

"If you wants to see somethink wot'll make you 'appy, you jest make Calves whistle or 'um, 'Ginger, You're Barmy,' then you see wot'll 'appen. You'll die o' laughin', you will really."

For a moment Mr. Wilton looked uncomprehendingly from Bindle to Ginger; then, appreciating the familiarity with which he had been addressed by a common workman, he turned and, with great dignity, walked from the room on the balls of his feet. Ginger watched him with gloomy malevolence.

"I don't 'old with ruddy waiters, like 'im," he remarked.

"All right, Ging, never you mind about Dicky Bird, you get on with your work."

Bindle picked up Wilkes's hat—a battered fawn bowler with a mourning band—and placed it upon the head of the late Sir Benjamin Biggs, Lady Knob-Kerrick's father, whose bust stood on an elaborate pedestal near the window.

"'E's on the bust now all right!" grinned Bindle as he regarded his handiwork.

In the space of twenty minutes the room was bare, but for an enormous pile of furniture in one corner. Soon sections of small japanned-bedsteads and bundles of bedding appeared mysteriously at the window, and were hauled in by Bindle and Ginger. After the bedsteads and bedding, there appeared four baths; these were immediately followed by four tin wash-handstands and basins, a long table, two looking-glasses, half a dozen towel-horses, and various other articles necessary to a well-ordered dormitory.

Throughout the proceedings Wilkes's cough could be heard as a sort of accompaniment from without.

"There's one thing, Ging," remarked Bindle, "there ain't much chance o' mislayin' pore ole Wilkie. That cough of 'is is as good as a bell round 'is neck."

At twelve o'clock, work was knocked off. Wilkes entered through the window carrying a frying-pan, and Huggles with a parcel wrapped in newspaper. Ginger and Bindle both went down the ladder, the first-named returning a minute later with a parcel, also wrapped in newspaper.

From his parcel Huggles produced a small piece of steak, which he proceeded to fry at the fire. Ginger in turn unfolded from its manifold wrappings a red-herring. Sticking this on the end of his knife he held it before the bars. Soon the room was flooded with a smell of burning red-herring and frying steak.

When Bindle entered a minute later he sniffed at the air in astonishment.

"Wot the 'ell are you up to?" he cried. "'Ere, Ginger, chuck that thing on the fire. As for you, 'Uggles, you ought to be ashamed o' yourself. Ain't you never been in a drawin'-room before? I'm surprised at 'im an' you, 'Uggles, that I am. Ginger, chuck that thing on the fire," he commanded.

Huggles muttered something about it being his dinner hour.

"I don't 'old wiv wastin' food," began Ginger.

"I don't care wot you 'old with, Ging, you got to chuck that sojer on the fire."

"It's only an 'erring," began Ginger.

"Yes; but it's got the stink of a whale," cried Bindle.

Reluctantly Ginger removed the sizzling morsel from the end of his knife and threw it on the fire, just as Mrs. Marlings entered. She gave a little cry as the pungent smell of Huggles' and Ginger's dinners smote her nostrils.

"Oh!" she cried, starting back, "whathever 'as 'appened? What a dreadful smell! Where can it——"

"It's Ginger forgot 'isself, mum," explained Bindle, with a withering glance in the direction of his subordinate. "'E thought 'e was in an 'Un dug-out. You see, mum, Ginger ain't 'appy in 'is 'ome life."

"But—but—look, it's hon the fire," cried Mrs. Marlings, pointing to Ginger's dinner, at which he was gazing with an expression that was a tragedy of regret.

When excited Mrs. Marlings had some difficulty with her aspirates. "Oh! Mr. Wilton," she cried to the butler, who entered at that moment, and stood regarding

the scene as Achilles might have viewed the reverses of the Greeks. "Oh! Mr. Wilton! take hit away, please, hit will poison us."

With his head held well in the air Mr. Wilton beckoned to John, who walked to the fireplace. With a majestic motion of his hand Mr. Wilton indicated to the footman that Ginger's offending dinner was to be removed. Gravely John took up the tongs, deliberately gripping the herring amidships, and turned towards the door, holding it aloft as if it were some sacred symbol.

Ginger's eyes were glued to the blackened shape.

"It ain't every red 'errin' wot 'as a funeral like that," remarked Bindle to Ginger.

Mr. Wilton threw open the door. Suddenly John started back and retreated, the herring still held before him, all smell and blue smoke.

"'Old me, 'Orace!" murmured Bindle, who was in a direct line with the door, "if it ain't the Ole Bird!"

Lady Knob-Kerrick entered, followed by Miss Strint, her companion and echo. Casting one annihilating look at the speechless John, she gazed with amazement at the disorder about her. Miss Strint gave vent to a spasmodic giggle, which Lady Knob-Kerrick did not even notice. Her gaze roved round the room as if she had found herself in unexpected surroundings. Finally her eyes fixed themselves on Mr. Wilton.

"Wilton, what is that John is holding?" Lady Knob-Kerrick prided herself on her self-control.

All eyes were immediately turned upon John, who shivered slightly.

"It is what they call a herring, a red-herring, my lady," responded Wilton. "Poor people eat them, I believe."

"And what is it doing in my drawing-room?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick with ominous calm.

"It was smellin', mum," broke in Bindle, "an' we was gettin' Calves to take it out. It's all through Ginger, 'e likes tasty food; but 'e ain't 'appy——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Lady Knob-Kerrick, turning to Bindle and withering him through her lorgnettes.

She turned once more to her major-domo.

"Wilton," she demanded, "what is the meaning of this outrage?"

"It's the billets, my lady."

"The what?"

"The billets, my lady."

"I haven't ordered any billets. What are billets?"

Suddenly her eye caught sight of the bust of the late Sir Benjamin Biggs.

"Who did that?" Rage had triumphed over self-control.

All eyes turned to the marble lineaments of the late Sir Benjamin's features. Never had that worthy knight presented so disreputable an appearance as he did with Huggles' hat stuck upon his head at a rakish angle.

"It must have been one of the workmen, my lady." Mr. Wilton tiptoed over to the bust and removed the offending headgear, placing it on a bundle of bedding.

"One of the workmen!" stormed Lady Knob-Kerrick. "Is everybody mad? What is being done with my drawing-room?"

Bindle stepped forward.

"We come from 'Arridges, mum, with the beds an' things for the soldiers."

"For the what?" demanded her ladyship.

"For the soldiers' billets, mum," explained Bindle. "You're goin' to billet sixteen soldiers 'ere."

"Billet sixteen soldiers!" almost screamed her ladyship, red in the face.

With great deliberation Bindle pulled out the delivery-note from behind his green baize apron, and read solemnly: "'Lady Knob-Kerrick, The Poplars, Putney 'Ill.' That's you, mum, ain't it?"

Lady Knob-Kerrick continued to stare at him stonily.

"'Sixteen bedsteads, bedding, four baths, four washin' stands, etcetera.' There's a rare lot of etceteras, mum. 'Fit up bedsteads in drawin'-room for billetin' soldiers,

carefully storin' at one end of room existin' furniture.' There ain't no mistake," said Bindle solemnly. "It's all on this 'ere paper, which was 'anded to me by the foreman this mornin'. There ain't no mistake, mum, really."

"But I tell you there is a mistake," cried Lady Knob-Kerrick angrily. "I have no intention of billeting soldiers *in my drawing-room*."

"Well, mum," said Bindle, shaking his head as if it were useless to fight against destiny, "it's all down 'ere on this 'ere paper, and if you're Lady Knob-Kerrick"—he referred to the paper again—"of The Poplars, Putney 'Ill, then you want these soldiers, sure as eggs. P'raps you forgotten," he added with illumination.

"Forgotten what?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick.

"Forgotten that you want sixteen soldiers, mum."

"Halt!"

A sharp snapping sound from without. Everybody turned to the window. The situation had become intensely dramatic. Bindle walked over, and looked out. Then turning to Lady Knob-Kerrick he said triumphantly:

"'Ere's the sixteen soldiers, mum, so there ain't no mistake."

"The what?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick looking about her helplessly.

"The sixteen soldiers with all their kit," said Bindle. "I counted 'em," he added, as if to remove any glimmer of doubt that might still exist in Lady Knob-Kerrick's mind.

"Is everybody mad?" Lady Knob-Kerrick fixed her eyes upon Wilton. Wilton looked towards the door, which opened to admit John, who had seized the occasion of the diversion to slip out with Ginger's dinner.

"The soldiers, my lady," he announced.

There was a tremendous tramping on the stairs, and a moment afterwards fifteen soldiers in the charge of a sergeant streamed in, each bearing his kit-bag, rifle, etc.

The men gazed about them curiously.

The sergeant looked bewildered at so many people being grouped to receive them. After a hasty glance round he saluted Lady Knob-Kerrick, then he

removed his cap, the men one by one sheepishly following suit.

"I hope we haven't come too soon, your ladyship?"

Lady Knob-Kerrick continued to stare at him through her lorgnettes. Wilton stepped forward.

"There has been a mistake. Her Ladyship cannot billet soldiers."

The sergeant looked puzzled. He drew a paper from his pocket, and read the address aloud: "'Lady Knob-Kerrick, The Poplars, Putney Hill, will billet sixteen soldiers in her drawing-room, she will also cater for them.'"

"Cater for them!" almost shrieked Lady Knob-Kerrick. "Cater for sixteen soldiers! I haven't ordered sixteen soldiers."

"I'm very sorry," said the sergeant, "but it's—it's——" The man looked at the paper he held in his hand.

"I don't care what you've got there," said Lady Knob-Kerrick rudely. "Strint!"

Lady Knob-Kerrick had suddenly caught sight of Miss Strint.

"Yes, my lady?" responded Miss Strint.

"Did I order sixteen soldiers?" demanded Lady Knob-Kerrick in a tone she always adopted with servants when she wanted confirmation.

"No, my lady, not as far as I know."

Lady Knob-Kerrick turned triumphantly to the sergeant, and stared at him through her lorgnettes.

"You hear?" she demanded.

"Yes, my lady, I hear," said the sergeant, respectful, but puzzled.

"Don't you think, mum, you could let 'em stay," insinuated Bindle, "seein' that all the stuff's 'ere."

"Let them stay!" Lady Knob-Kerrick regarded Bindle in amazement. "Let them stay *in my drawing-room*!" She pronounced the last four words as if Bindle's remark had outraged her sense of delicacy.

"They wouldn't be doin' no 'arm, mum, if——"

"No harm!" cried Lady Knob-Kerrick, gazing indignantly at Bindle through her lorgnettes. "Soldiers in my drawing-room!"

"If it wasn't for them, mum," said Bindle dryly, "you'd be 'avin' soldiers in your bedroom—'Uns," he added significantly.

Lady Knob-Kerrick hesitated. She was conscious of having been forced upon rather delicate ground, and she prided herself upon her patriotism. Suddenly inspiration seized her. She turned on Bindle fiercely.

"Why are *you* not in the army?" she demanded, with the air of a cross-examining counsel about to draw from a witness a damning admission.

Bindle scratched his head through his cricket-cap. He was conscious that all eyes were turned upon him.

"Answer me!" commanded Lady Knob-Kerrick triumphantly. "Why are you not

in the army?"

Bindle looked up innocently at his antagonist.

"You got 'various' veins in your legs, mum?" He lowered his eyes to Lady Knob-Kerrick's boots.

"How—how dare you!" gasped Lady Knob-Kerrick, aware that the soldiers were broadly grinning, and that every eye in the room had followed the direction of Bindle's gaze.

"Because," continued Bindle quietly, "when you 'ave 'various' veins in your legs you ain't no good for the army. I went on tryin' till they said they'd run me in for wastin' time."

"I seen 'im!"

The remark came from Ginger, who, finding that he had centred upon himself everybody's attention, looked extremly ill-at-ease. Bindle looked across at him in surprise. Impulse with Ginger was rare.

With flaming face and murderous eyes Lady Knob-Kerrick turned to the sergeant.

"You will remove your sixteen soldiers and take them back and say that they were not ordered. As for you," she turned to Bindle, "you had better take all these things back again and tell Harridge's that I shall close my account, and I shall sue them for damages to my drawing-room"; and with that she marched out of the room.

At a word from the sergeant the men trooped out, putting on their caps and grinning broadly. Bindle scratched his head, took out his pipe and proceeded to fill it, signing to his colleagues to get the beds and bedding down to the van.

"Quick march!" The short sharp order from below was followed by a crunch of gravel, and then the men broke out into a song, "Here we are, here we are, here we are again." Bindle went to the window and looked out. As the sound died away in the distance, the question "Are we downhearted?" was heard, followed immediately by the chorused reply:

"Noooooooo!"

"My! ain't them boys jest 'It,'" muttered Bindle as he withdrew his head and

proceeded with the work of reloading the van.

Two hours later the van was grinding down Putney Hill with the skid-pan adjusted. Ginger had gone home, Wilkes was on top, and Bindle sat on the tail-board smoking.

"Well, 'e got 'ome all right on the Ole Bird to-day," remarked Bindle contentedly. "My! ain't 'e a knock-out for 'is little joke. Beats me does Mr. Little, an' I takes a bit o' beatin'."

CHAPTER XVI

MILLIE'S WEDDING

"It don't seem right, some'ow," muttered Bindle, as he stood before the oval mirror of what a misguided Fulham tradesman had catalogued as "an elegant duchesse dressing-table in walnut substitute." "A concertina-'at don't seem jest right for a weddin'!"

Bindle readjusted the crush-hat that had come to him as part of the properties belonging to the Oxford Adventure. He tried it on the back of his head, over his eyes and at the Sir David Beatty Angle.

"Oh, get out of the way, do! We shall be late." Mrs. Bindle, in petticoat and camisole, pushed Bindle aside and took her place in front of the mirror. "Anybody would think you was a woman, standing looking at yourself in front of the glass. What'll Mr. Hearty say if we're late?"

"You need never be afraid of what 'Earty'll say," remarked Bindle philosophically, "because 'e'll never say anythink wot can't be printed in a parish magazine."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed and continued patting her hair with the palm of her hand. Bindle still stood regarding his crush-hat regretfully.

"You can't wear a hat like that at a wedding," snapped Mrs. Bindle; "that's for a dress-suit."

Bindle heaved a sigh.

"I'd a liked to 'ave worn a top 'at at Millikins' weddin'," he remarked with genuine regret; "but as you'd say, Mrs. B.," he remarked, regaining his good-humour, "Gawd 'as ordained otherwise, so it's a 'ard 'at for J.B. to-day."

"Remember you're going to chapel, Bindle," remarked Mrs. Bindle, "and it's a sin to enter the House of God with blasphemy upon your lips."

"Is it really?" was Bindle's only comment, as he produced the hard hat and began to brush it with the sleeve of his coat. This done he took up a position behind

Mrs. Bindle, bent his knees and proceeded to fix it on his head, appropriating to his own use such portion of the mirror as could be seen beneath Mrs. Bindle's left arm.

"Oh, get away, do!" Mrs. Bindle turned on him angrily; but Bindle had achieved his object, and had adjusted his hat at what he felt was the correct angle for weddings. He next turned his attention to a large white rose, which he proceeded to force into his buttonhole. This time he took up a position on Mrs. Bindle's right and, going through the same process, managed to get the complete effect of the buttonhole plus the hat. He next proceeded to draw on a pair of canary-coloured wash-leather gloves. This done he picked up a light cane, heavily adorned with yellow metal and, Mrs. Bindle having temporarily left the mirror, he placed himself before it.

"Personally myself," he remarked, "I don't see that Charlie'll 'ave a sportin' chance to-day. Lord! I pays for dressin'," he remarked, popping quickly aside as Mrs. Bindle bore down upon him. "You ought to be a proud woman to-day, Mrs. B.," he continued. "There's many a fair 'eart wot'll flutter as I walks up the aisle." Mrs. Bindle's head, however, was enveloped in the folds of her skirt, which she was endeavouring to assume without rumpling her hair.

"Ah! Mrs. B.," Bindle said reprovingly, "late again, late again!" He proceeded to bite off the end of a cigar which he lit.

"Don't smoke that cigar," snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"Not smoke a cigar at a weddin'!" exclaimed Bindle incredulously. "Then if you can't smoke a cigar at a weddin', when the 'ell can you smoke one."

"Don't you use those words at me," retorted Mrs. Bindle. "If you smoke you'll smell of smoke in the chapel."

"The only smell I ever smelt in that chapel is its own smell, and that ain't a pleasant one. Any'ow, I'll put it out before I gets to the door. I'm jest goin' to 'op round to see Millikins."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," cried Mrs. Bindle with decision. "You mustn't see a bride before she appears at the chapel."

Bindle stopped dead on his way to the door and, turning round, exclaimed, "Mustn't wot?"

"You mustn't see a bride before she appears at the chapel or church. It isn't proper."

"Well, I'm blowed!" cried Bindle. "You mean to tell me that Charlie Dixon ain't goin' to nip round and 'ave a look at 'er this mornin'?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Bindle.

"But why?" persisted Bindle.

"Because it's not proper; it's not the right thing to do," replied Mrs. Bindle, as she struggled into her bodice.

"Now ain't that funny," said Bindle. "I suppose it all come about because they was afraid the chap might sort o' funk it and do a bunk, not likin' the looks o' the gal. Any'ow that ain't likely to 'appen with Millikins. The cove wot gets 'er, 'as got a winner."

"Thought you didn't believe in marriage," said Mrs. Bindle acidly.

"I don't, Mrs. B.," replied Bindle. "Leastways the marriages wot are made in the place where they don't play billiards; but this little one was made in the Putney Cinema Pavilion. I made it myself, and when J.B. takes a thing in 'and, it's goin' to be top 'ole. Then," he proceeded after a pause, "Millikins 'as got me to look after 'er. If 'er man didn't make 'er 'appy, I'd skin 'im; yes, and rub salt in afterwards."

There was a grimness in Bindle's voice that caused Mrs. Bindle to pause in the process of pinning a brooch in her bodice.

"Yes, Mrs. B.," continued Bindle, "that little gal means an 'ell of a lot to me, I ——"

Mrs. Bindle looked round, a little startled at a huskiness in Bindle's voice. She was just in time to see him disappear through the bedroom-door. When she returned to the looking-glass, the face that was reflected back to her was that of a woman in whose eyes there was something of disappointment and cheated longing.

Mrs. Bindle proceeded with her toilet. Everything seemed to go wrong, and each article she required appeared to have hidden itself away. Finally she assumed her bonnet, a study in two tints of green, constructed according to the inevitable plan

upon which all her bonnets were built, narrow of gauge with a lofty superstructure. She gave a final glance at herself in the glass, and sighed her satisfaction at the sight of the maroon-coloured dress with the bright green bonnet.

When Mrs. Bindle emerged into Fenton Street, working on her white kid gloves with feverish movement, she found Bindle engaged in chatting with a group of neighbours.

"'Ere comes my little beetroot," remarked Bindle; at which Mrs. Rogers went off into a shriek of laughter and told him to "Go hon, do!"

Mrs. Bindle acknowledged the salutations of her neighbours with a frigid inclination of her head. She strongly objected to Bindle's "holding any truck" with the occupants of other houses in Fenton Street.

"Well, well, s'long, all of you!" said Bindle. "It ain't my weddin', that's one thing."

There were cheery responses to Bindle's remarks, and sotto voce references to Mrs. Bindle as "a stuck-up cat."

"Mind you throw that cigar away before we get to the chapel," said Mrs. Bindle, still working at her gloves.

"Right-o!" said Bindle, as they turned into the New King's Road. He waved the hand containing the cigar in salutation to the driver of a passing motor-bus with whom he was acquainted.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Mrs. Bindle snappishly.

"Wouldn't do wot?" enquired Bindle innocently.

"Recognising common people when you're with me," was the response.

"But that was 'Arry Sales," said Bindle, puzzled at Mrs. Bindle's attitude. "'E ain't common, 'e drives a motor-bus."

"What will people think?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"Oh! they're used to 'Arry drivin' a bus," replied Bindle. "They might think it funny if he was to drive an 'earse."

"You know what I mean," said Mrs. Bindle. "Why can't you remember that

you're goin' to a wedding."

"Nobody wouldn't know it from your looks, Mrs. B.," commented Bindle. "You look about as 'appy as 'Earty does when 'e 'ears there's goin' to be an air-raid."

"Oh, don't talk to me!" snapped Mrs. Bindle; and they continued on their way in silence. When about a hundred yards from the Alton Road Chapel, Mrs. Bindle demanded of Bindle that he throw away his cigar, which he did with great reluctance.

There was a small collection of women and children outside the chapel doors.

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Bindle suddenly.

"Where?" enquired Bindle, looking first to the right and left, then on the ground and finally up at the sky.

"I knew we should be late," said Mrs. Bindle. "There's the carriage."

At that moment a two-horse carriage bearing Mr. Hearty and Millie passed by, and drew up at the entrance to the chapel. Mr. Hearty's white kid-gloved hand appeared out of the window, fumbling with the handle of the carriage. A moment later his silk hat, adorned with a deep black band, appeared; still the carriage-door refused to open. Suddenly as if out of sheer mischief it gave way, and Mr. Hearty lurched forward, his hat fell off and rolled under the carriage. A stray dog, that had been watching the proceedings, dashed for the hat, just at the moment that Mr. Hearty hurriedly stepped out to retrieve his headgear. Mr. Hearty's foot came down upon the dog's paw. The animal gave a heart-rending howl, Mr. Hearty jumped, the people laughed, and the dog continued to howl, holding up its wounded paw.

Mr. Hearty, however, was intent upon the recapture of his hat. With his silver-mounted umbrella, he started poking beneath the carriage to try and coax it towards him. An elderly gentleman, seeing the mishap, had approached from the other side of the carriage and, with his stick, was endeavouring to achieve the same object. The result was that, as soon as one drew the hat towards him, the other immediately snatched it away again.

"It's like a game of 'ockey," said Bindle who had come up at this moment. "Go it, 'Earty, you got it!"

Mrs. Bindle tore at Bindle's arm, just as the benevolent gentleman succeeded in

securing Mr. Hearty's hat. Mr. Hearty dashed round to the other side of the carriage, snatched his damaged headgear from the hands of the stranger, and stood brushing it upon the sleeve of his coat.

"Excuse me, sir!" said the stranger.

"But it's my hat," said Mr. Hearty, endeavouring to restore something of its lost glossiness.

Mr. Hearty had apparently forgotten all about the bride, and it was Bindle who helped Millie from the carriage, and led her into the chapel. Mrs. Bindle reminded Mr. Hearty of his duty. Putting his hat on his head, he entered the chapel door. It was Mrs. Bindle also who reminded him of his mistake.

"It's a good omen, Uncle Joe," whispered Millie as she clung to Bindle's arm.

"Wot's a good omen, Millikins?" enquired Bindle.

"That you should take me in instead of father," she whispered just as Mr. Hearty bustled up and relieved Bindle.

There was a craning of necks and a hum of voices as Mr. Hearty, intensely nervous, led his daughter up to the altar. Bindle followed, carrying Mr. Hearty's hat and umbrella.

"My! don't 'is Nibs look smart," Bindle muttered to himself, as he caught sight of Charlie Dixon standing at the further end of the chapel.

The Rev. Mr. Sopley had come up from Eastbourne specially for the occasion, Millie refusing to be married by Mr. MacFie. The ceremony dragged its mournful course to the point where Millie and Charlie Dixon had become man and wife. Mr. Sopley then plunged into a lugubrious address full of dreary foreboding. He spoke of orphans, widowhood, plague and famine, the uncertainty of human life and the persistent quality of sin.

"'E ain't much at marrying," whispered Bindle to Mr. Hearty; "but 'e ought to be worth a rare lot for funerals." Mr. Hearty turned and gazed at Bindle uncomprehendingly.

It was Bindle who snatched the first kiss from the bride, and it was he who, in the vestry, lightened the depressing atmosphere by his cheerfulness. Mrs. Hearty in mauve and violet dabbed her eyes and beat her breast with rigid impartiality.

Mr. Hearty strove to brush his hat into respectability.

Millie, clinging to her soldier-husband, stood with downcast eyes. Bindle looked at her with interest, as she stood a meek and charming figure in a coat and skirt of puritan grey, with a toque of the same shade.

Mr. Sopley shook hands mechanically with everybody, casting his eyes up to heaven as if mournfully presaging the worst.

"About the gloomiest ole cove I ever come across," whispered Bindle to Mrs. Hearty, whereat she collapsed upon a seat and heaved with silent laughter.

It was Bindle who broke up the proceedings.

"Now then, Charlie, 'op it, I'm 'ungry!" he said; and Charlie Dixon, who had seemed paralysed, moved towards the vestry door.

It was Bindle who held on Mr. Hearty's hat when he entered his carriage, and it was Bindle who heaved and pushed Mrs. Hearty until she was able to take her place beside her lawful spouse.

It was Bindle who went back and captured the vague and indeterminate Mr. Sopley, and brought him in the last carriage, that he might participate in the wedding-breakfast.

"Come along, sir," he said to the pastor. "Never mind about 'eaven, let's come and cut ole 'Earty's pineapple, that'll make 'im ratty."

During the journey Bindle went on to explain that Mr. Hearty never expected a guest to have the temerity to cut a pineapple when placed upon his hospitable board.

"Is that so?" remarked Mr. Sopley, not in the least understanding what Bindle was saying.

"It is," said Bindle solemnly; "you see, they goes back into stock."

"Ah-h-h-h!" remarked Mr. Sopley, gazing at the roof of the carriage.

"Clever ole bird this," muttered Bindle. "About as brainy as a cock-sparrow wot's 'ad the wind knocked out of 'im."

When Bindle entered the Heartys' dining-room he found the atmosphere one of unrelieved gloom. Mrs. Hearty was crying, Mr. Hearty looked nervously solemn,

Mrs. Bindle was uncompromisingly severe, and the other guests all seemed intensely self-conscious. The men gazed about them for some place to put their hats and umbrellas, the women wondered what they should do with their hands. At the further end of the room stood Millie and Charlie Dixon, Millie's hand still tucked through her husband's arm. Never was there such joylessness as in Mr. Hearty's dining-room that morning.

"'Ullo, 'ullo!" cried Bindle as he entered with Mr. Sopley. "Ain't this a jolly little crowd!"

Millie brightened-up instantaneously, Charlie Dixon looked relieved. Mr. Hearty dashed forward to welcome Mr. Sopley, tripped over Bindle's cane, which he was holding awkwardly, and landed literally on Mr. Sopley's bosom.

Mr. Sopley stepped back and struck his head against the edge of the door.

"Look at 'earty tryin' to kiss ole Woe-and-Whiskers," remarked Bindle audibly. Millie giggled, Charlie Dixon smiled, Mrs. Bindle glared, and the rest of the guests looked either disapprovingly at Bindle, or sympathetically at Mr. Hearty and Mr. Sopley. Mrs. Hearty collapsed into a chair and began to undulate with mirth.

"Couldn't we 'ave an 'ymn?" suggested Bindle.

Mr. Hearty looked round from abjectly apologising to Mr. Sopley. He hesitated a moment and glanced towards the harmonium.

"Uncle Joe is only joking, father," said Millie.

Mr. Hearty looked at Bindle reproachfully.

"Now then, let's set down," said Bindle.

After much effort and a considerable expenditure of physical force, he managed to get the guests seated at the table.

At a sign from Mr. Hearty, Mr. Sopley rose to say grace.

Every one but Bindle was watching for the movement, and a sudden silence fell on the assembly from which Bindle's remark stood out with clear-cut emphasis.

"Ole 'Earty playing 'ockey with 'is top 'at under——" Then Bindle stopped, looking about him with a grin.

Gravely and ponderously Mr. Sopley besought the Lord to make the assembly grateful for what they were about to receive, and amidst a chorus of "amens" the guests resumed their seats.

The wedding party was a small one. For once Mr. Hearty had found that patriotism was not at issue with economy. The guests consisted of the bridegroom's mother, a gentle, sweet-faced woman with white hair and a sunny smile, her brother-in-law, Mr. John Dixon, a red-faced, hurly-burly type of man, a genial, loud-voiced John Bull, hearty of manner and heavy of hand, and half a dozen friends and relatives of the Heartys.

At the head of the table sat Millie and Charlie Dixon, at the foot was Mr. Sopley. The other guests were distributed without thought or consideration as to precedence. Bindle found himself between Mrs. Dixon and Mrs. Hearty. Mrs. Bindle was opposite, where she had planted herself to keep watch. Mr. Hearty sat next to Mrs. Dixon, facing Mr. Dixon, whose uncompromising stare Mr. Hearty found it difficult to meet with composure.

Alice, the maid-servant, reinforced by her sister Bertha, heavy of face and flat of foot, attended to the wants of the guests.

The meal began in constrained silence. The first episode resulted from Alice's whispered enquiry if Mr. Dixon would have lime-juice or lemonade.

"Beer!" cried Mr. Dixon in a loud voice.

Alice looked across at Mr. Hearty, who, being quite unequal to the situation, looked at Alice, and then directed his gaze towards Mr. Sopley.

"I beg pardon, sir?" said Alice.

"Beer!" roared Mr. Dixon.

Everybody began to feel uncomfortable except Bindle, who was watching the little comedy with keen enjoyment.

"We—we——" began Mr. Hearty—"we don't drink beer, Mr. Dixon."

"Don't drink beer?" cried Mr. Dixon in the tone of a man who has just heard that another doesn't wear socks. "Don't drink beer?"

Mr. Hearty shook his head miserably, as if fully conscious of his shortcomings.

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Dixon, "most extraordinary!"

"Well, I'll have a whisky-and-soda," he conceded magnanimously.

Mr. Hearty rolled his eyes and cast a languishing glance in the direction of Mrs. Bindle.

"We are temperance," said Mr. Hearty.

"What!" roared Mr. Dixon incredulously. "Temperance! temperance at a wedding!"

"Always," said Mr. Hearty.

"Hmmmm!" snorted Mr. Dixon. He glared down the length of the table as if the guests comprised a new species.

Alice repeated her question about the lemonade and lime-juice.

"I should be sick if I drank it," said Mr. Dixon crossly. "I'll have a cup of tea."

"'E's like me, mum," said Bindle to Mrs. Dixon who was greatly distressed at the occurrence, "'e likes 'is glass of beer and ain't none the worse for it."

Mrs. Dixon smiled understandingly.

The meal continued, gloomily silent, or with whispered conversations, as if the guests were afraid of hearing their own voices.

Bindle turned to Mrs. Hearty. "Look 'ere, Martha!" he cried. "We ain't a very cheer-o crowd, are we? Ain't you got none of them naughty stories o' yours to tell jest to make us laugh."

Mrs. Hearty was in the act of conveying a piece of chicken to her mouth. The chicken and fork dropped back to the plate with a jangle, and she leaned back in her chair, heaving and wheezing with laughter.

"Look 'ere, sir!" said Bindle, addressing Mr. Sopley, who temporarily withdrew his eyes from the ceiling. "I 'ad a little argument with a cove the other day, as to where this 'ere was to be found. I said it's from the Bible, 'e says it's from *The Pink 'Un*."

Bindle looked round to assure himself that he had attracted the attention of the whole table.

"Now this is it. 'The Lord said unto Moses come forth, and 'e come fifth an' lorst the cup.'"

Mrs. Dixon smiled, Millie and Charlie Dixon laughed; but Mr. Dixon threw himself back in his chair and roared. Mr. Hearty looked apprehensively at Mr. Sopley, who regarded Bindle with uncomprehending eyes.

"You've lost your money, Mr. Bindle, you've lost your money; it's *The Pink 'Un*, I'll bet my life on it," choked Mr. Dixon. "Best thing I've heard for years, 'pon my soul it is!" he cried.

"Mr. Bindle, I'm afraid you are a very naughty man," said Mrs. Dixon gently.

"Me, mum?" enquired Bindle with assumed innocence. "Me naughty? That's jest where you're wrong, mum. When I die, it ain't the things I done wot I shall be sorry for; but the things wot I ain't done, and as for 'Earty, 'e'll be as sorry for 'imself as Ginger was when 'e got a little dose o' twins."

"Bindle, remember there are ladies present!" cried the outraged Mrs. Bindle from the other side of the table.

"It's all right, Mrs. B.," said Bindle reassuringly. "These was gentlemen twins."

The meal progressed solemn and joyless. Few remarks were made, but much food and drink was consumed. Bindle made a point of cutting both the pineapples that adorned the table, delighting in the anguish he saw on Mr. Hearty's face.

"If they only 'ad a drink," groaned Bindle, "it would sort o' wake 'em up; but wot can you do on lemonade and glass-ginger. Can't even 'ave stone-ginger, because they're sort of afraid it might make 'em tight."

When everyone had eaten to repletion, Mr. Hearty cast a glance round and then, with the butt-end of a knife, rapped loudly on the table. There was a sudden hush. Mr. Hearty looked intently at Mr. Sopley, who was far away engaged in a contemplation of heaven, via the ceiling. Bindle began to clap, which brought Mr. Sopley back to earth.

Seeing what was required of him, he rose with ponderous solemnity and, in his best "grief-and-woe" manner, proceeded to propose the health of the bride in a sepulchral voice, reminiscent of a damp Church of England service in the country.

"Dear friends." He raised a pair of anguished eyes to the green and yellow paper festoons that trailed from the electrolier above the dining-table to various picture nails in the walls. He paused, his lips moving slowly and impressively, then aloud he continued:

"Dear friends, of all the ceremonies that attend our brief stay in this vale of tears, marriage is infinitely the most awful—("'Ear, 'ear!" from Bindle, and murmurs of "Hush!"). It is a contract entered into—er—er—in the sight of heaven; but with —er—er—the Almighty's blessing it may be a linking of hands of two of—er—God's creatures as they pass down the—er—er—valley of the shadow of death to eternal and lasting salvation." Mr. Sopley paused.

"'Ere, I say, sir," broke in Bindle. "Cheer up, this ain't a funeral."

There were murmurs of "Hussssssssh!" Mrs. Hearty began to cry quietly. Mr. Hearty appeared portentously solemn, Mrs. Bindle looked almost cheerful.

"We see two young people," resumed Mr. Sopley, having apparently renewed his store of ideas from a further contemplation of the ceiling, "on the threshold of life, with all its disappointments and temptations, all its sin and misery, all its fears and misgivings. We know that—we know—we have evidence of——" Mr. Sopley lost the thread of his discourse, and once more returned to his contemplation of Mr. Hearty's ceiling. Bindle beat his fist on the table; but was silenced by a "Hussssssssh" from several of the guests.

"Marriages," continued Mr. Sopley, "marriages are made in heaven——"

"I knew you was goin' to say that, sir," broke in Bindle cheerfully. "'Ere, stop it!" he yelled, stooping down to rub his shin. "Who's a-kickin' me under the table?" he fixed a suspicious eye upon a winter-worn spinster in a vieux rose satin blouse sitting opposite.

"Marriage is a thing of terrible solemnity," resumed Mr. Sopley, "not to be entered upon lightly, or with earthly thoughts. It is symbolical of many things, sometimes terrible things—("'Ere, 'ere!" interposed Bindle)—but throughout all its vicissitudes, in spite of all earthly woes, desolation, and despair, it should be remembered that there is One above to Whom all prayers should be directed, and in Whom all hope should be reposed.

"In the course of the long life that the Lord has granted me, I have joined together in holy wedlock many young couples—("Shame!" from Bindle, and a

laugh from Mr. Dixon),—and I hope our young friends here will find in it that meed of happiness which we all wish them."

In spite of the entire lack of conviction with which Mr. Sopley wished the bridal pair happiness, he resumed his seat amidst murmurs of approval. His words were too solemn to be followed by applause from anyone save Bindle, who tapped the table loudly with the butt-end of his knife. Everyone looked towards Charlie Dixon, who in turn looked appealingly at Bindle.

Interpreting the glance to mean that Bindle contemplated replying, Mrs. Bindle kicked him beneath the table.

"'Ere, who's kicking me on the shins again?" he cried as he rose. Mrs. Bindle frowned at him. "Oh, it's you, is it?" he remarked. "Now, Charlie, you see what's goin' to 'appen to you now you're married. Been kickin' my shins all the mornin', she 'as, me with 'various' veins in my legs too."

Bindle looked at Millie; it was obvious that she was on the point of tears. Charlie Dixon was gazing down at her solicitously. Mr. Dixon was clearly annoyed. At the conclusion of Mr. Sopley's address he had cleared his throat impressively, as if prepared to enter the lists. Mrs. Dixon gazed anxiously at her son. Mr. Hearty looked at Mrs. Bindle. Mrs. Bindle's eyes were fixed on Bindle. Bindle rose deliberately.

"If ever I wants to get married again," began Bindle, looking at Mr. Sopley, "I'll come to you, sir, to tie me up. It'll sort o' prepare me for the worst; but I got to wait till Mrs. B. 'ops it with the lodger; not 'ole Guppy," he added, "'e's gone."

Mr. Dixon laughed loudly; into Mrs. Bindle's cheeks there stole a flush of anger.

"Well!" continued Bindle, "I promised Charlie that 'e shouldn't 'ave no speeches to make, an' so I'm on my 'ind legs a-givin' thanks for all them cheerful things wot we jest 'eard about. I ain't altogether a believer in 'ow to be 'appy though married; but this 'ere gentleman—(Bindle indicated Mr. Sopley by a jerk of his thumb)—well, 'e can give me points. No one didn't ought to 'ave such ideas wot ain't done time for bigamy. I can see now why there ain't no givin' an' takin' in marriage up there;" and Bindle raised his eyes to the ceiling. "I got a new respect for 'eaven, I 'ave.

"I don't rightly understand wot 'e means by 'a vale o' tears,' or 'walkin' 'and in 'and along the valley o' the shadow.' P'raps they're places 'e's been to abroad. I

seen a good deal o' wanderin' 'and in 'and along the river between Putney an' 'Ammersmith, I'm a special, you know. I 'ad to ask the sergeant to change my dooty. Used to make me 'ot all over, it did.

"There's one thing where you're wrong, sir." Bindle turned to Mr. Sopley, who reluctantly brought his eyes down from the ceiling to gaze vacantly at Bindle. "You said this 'ere marriage was made in 'eaven. Well, it wasn't; it was made in Fulham."

Mrs. Dixon smiled. Mr. Dixon guffawed. Mr. Hearty looked anxiously from Mrs. Bindle to Mr. Sopley.

"I made it myself, so I ought to know," proceeded Bindle. "I seen a good deal o' them two kids." He looked affectionately at Millie. "An' if they ain't goin' to be 'appy in Fulham instead o' wanderin' about vales and valleys a-snivellin', you got one up against Joe Bindle.

"I remember once 'earin' a parson say that when we died and went to the sort of Ole Bailey in the sky, we should be asked if we'd ever done anybody a good turn. If we 'ad, then we'd got a sportin' chance. When I'm dead I can see myself a-knockin' at them golden gates of 'eaven, sort o' registered letter knock wot means an answer's wanted. When they ask me if I ever done anyone a good turn, I shall say I got Millikins an' Charlie Dixon tied up.

"'Right-o, ole sport!' they'll say, "op in.'

"An' I shall nip in quick before they can bang the gates to, like they do on the tube. Then I shall see ole 'Earty, all wings an' whiskers, a-playin' rag-time on an 'arp."

Again Mr. Dixon's hearty laugh rang out. "Splendid!" he cried. "Splendid!"

"I seen a good deal o' marriage one way an' another. Me an' Mrs. B. 'ave been tied up a matter o' nineteen years, an' look at 'er. Don't she look 'appy?"

Everybody turned to regard Mrs. Bindle.

"Then," continued Bindle, "there's 'Earty. Look at 'im. One of the jolliest coves I know."

Mechanically all eyes were directed towards Mr. Hearty.

"It all depends 'ow you goes about marriage. There's one thing you got to

remember before you gets married: bottles is returnable, likewise new-laid eggs wot ain't new laid; but you can't return your missus, not even if you pays the carriage. It's a lifer, is marriage.

"I ain't goin' to make a long speech, because the pubs close at 'alf-past two, an' you'll all want to wash the taste o' this 'ere lemonade out o' your mouths."

Bindle paused and looked at the now happy faces of Millie and Charlie Dixon. For a moment he gazed at them, then with suddenness he resumed his seat, conscious that his voice had failed him and that he was blinking and swallowing with unnecessary vigour. The silence was broken only by the loud thumping on the table of Mr. Dixon.

"Bravo!" he cried. "Bravo! one of the best speeches I've ever heard. Excellent! Splendid!"

Everybody looked at everybody else, as if wondering what would happen next, and obviously deploring Mr. Dixon's misguided enthusiasm.

Alice solved the problem by entering and whispering to Millie that the taxi was at the door. This was a signal for a general movement, a pushing back of chairs and shuffling of feet as the guests rose.

Charlie Dixon walked across to Bindle.

"Get us off quickly, Uncle Joe, will you," he whispered. "Millie doesn't think she can stand much more."

"Right-o, Charlie!" replied Bindle. "Leave it to me."

"Now then, 'urry up, 'urry up!" he called out. "You'll lose that train, come along. Once aboard the motor and the gal is mine! Now, Charlie, where's your cap? I'll see about the luggage."

Almost before anyone knew what was happening, they were gazing at the tail-end of a taxi-cab being driven rapidly eastward. When it had disappeared over the bridge, Bindle turned away and found himself blinking into the moist eyes of Mrs. Dixon. He coughed violently, then, as she smiled through her tears, he remarked:

"Ain't I an ole fool, mum?" he said.

"Mr. Bindle," she said in a voice that was none too well under control, "I think

you have been their fairy-godmother."

"Well I am a bit of an ole woman at times," remarked Bindle, swallowing elaborately. "Now I must run after my little bit of 'eaven, or else she'll be off with Ole Woe-and-Whiskers. It's wonderful 'ow misery seems to attract some women."

He took two steps towards the door, then turning to Mrs. Dixon said:

"Don't you worry, mum, 'e'll come back all right. Gawd ain't a-goin' to spoil the 'appiness of them two young kids."

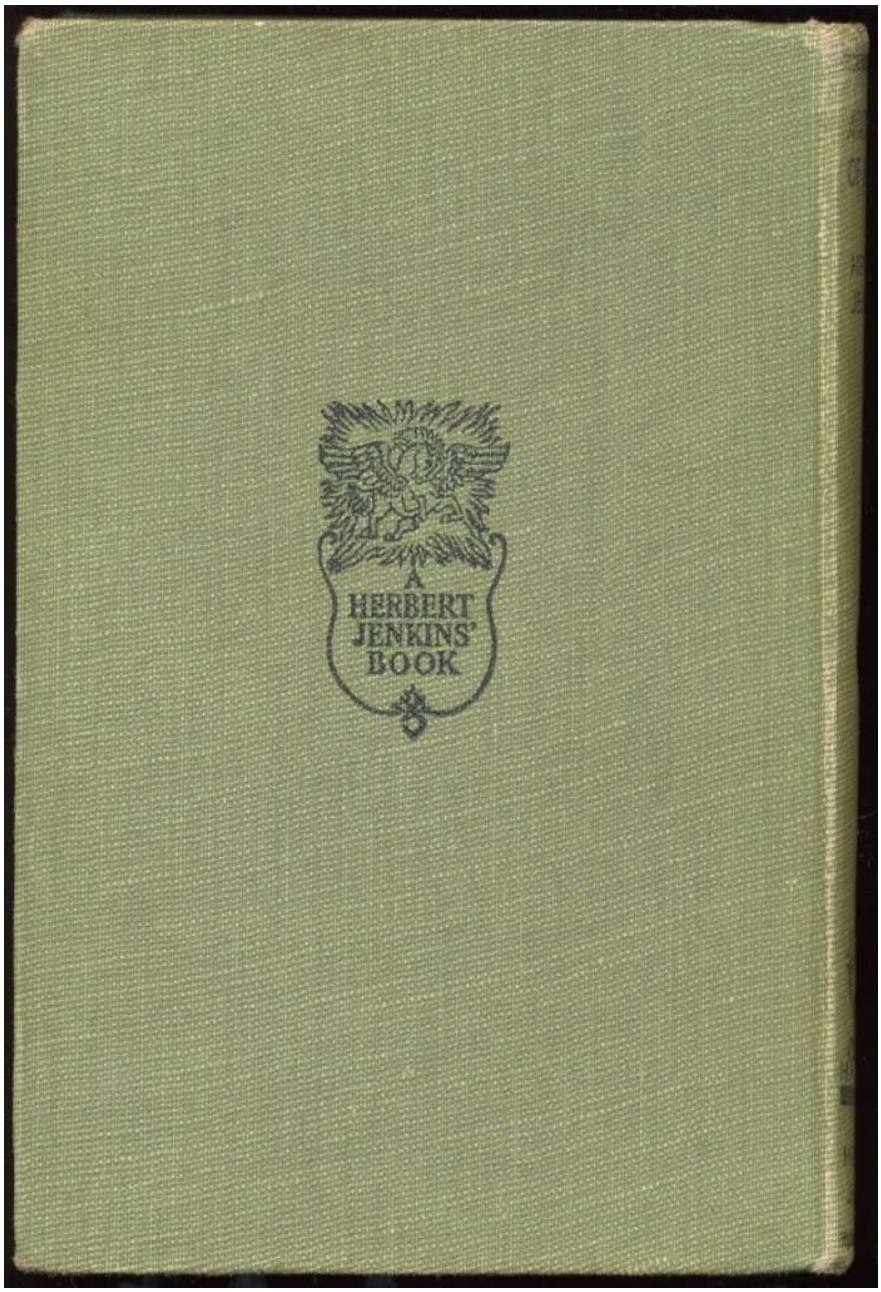
Mrs. Dixon's tears were now raining fast down her cheeks.

"Mr. Bindle," she said, "you must be a very good man."

Bindle stared at her for a moment in astonishment, and then turned and walked through the Heartys' private door.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered. "Fancy 'er a-sayin' that. I wonder wot ole 'Earty 'ud think. Well, I'm blowed! 'Ere, come along, sir!" he cried to Mr. Dixon. "It's a quarter past two, we jest got a quarter of an hour;" and the two men passed down the High Street in the direction of Putney Bridge.

THE END



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