"Whither Thou Goest"

BY MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE

AN open letter lay spread on Dr. Gilbert's office desk, and at the desk its owner was sitting, his pen in his hand, a blank sheet of paper before him; but the ink on the pen was dry, the page was clear, and Dr. Gilbert was leaning back in his desk-chair, his brow heavy with thought, his eyes lifted absently as if to a scene far away. His face was not one that lent itself easily to dejection. It was clever, keen, and hard in spite of its youth, and the features were too strongly marked and immobile, but they had a certain aloofness of expression not without its charm—as there is charm in the strength of any bold, unchanging outline, harsh and craggy though it be. The eyes were but just redeemed from coldness by the intellect behind, which could light them to brilliancy, and at all times gave to them that penetrating depth of expression which goes with power of mind. With this face and a frame large, vigorous, and muscular there was little chance for morbid expression; and yet, as Dr. Gilbert sat at his desk gazing into space, in both his face and figure there were depression and discouragement. The letter which lay open before him bore the post-mark of a distant Western city, and was from a physician well known to the medical world. The writer spoke with brief simplicity of his age and failing powers, and in terms as direct recalled an old debt of gratitude to the young physician's father, in that remembrance offering to the son a partnership for the present, later the full inheritance of a long, successful life. As a graduate of but a few years' standing, unmarried, with no future before him save what in a small village he was slowly carving out for himself, it would have seemed that to such an offer Dr. Gilbert could make but one reply. Yet it was long after midnight, and he was still sitting as he had sat for hours, his answer unwritten. The night bell ringing at his bed-side upstairs roused him at last with a start. Usually the night call had an insistent jangle, as if in self-justification, but there was an indecision in this ring which made the young physician pause, half risen from his chair, waiting for the sound to be repeated. A moment later the bell pealed out again more strongly, and, his quick footfall resounding in the quiet house, Dr. Gilbert went to the door. The light from the high hall lamp streamed out of the open door on the figure standing on the upper step—a man heavily built and rudely clad, whom Dr. Gilbert recognized as a young master-mechanic he had seen going to and from his work. He knew that the man was an old resident of the town, also that he was not his patient.

"Well?" he asked, shortly, for the workman, taken by surprise at the physician's abrupt appearance from his dim office, and blinded by the bright light, pulled off his hat awkwardly to stand silently blinking. "Well?" repeated Dr. Gilbert, impatiently.

"We—we—need a doctor at our house, and I—we thought—"

Dr. Gilbert's ready frown gathered. "Who's your family doctor?" he asked, curtly. "Why don't you go to him at this hour of night?"

The workman raised his eyes. His short thick eyelashes were wet, and his twitching face crimson with his effort for self-control. Dr. Gilbert's manner changed as he recognized the evidence of a real distress.

"You ought to get your own doctor, you know," he repeated, but less harshly. At the change of tone the workman seemed to find courage.

"My wife won't have him for this, sir," he said, manfully. "But we don't owe him a cent. She seen you, and she wants you, and—we thought if you'd come—"

Dr. Gilbert glanced again doubtfully

at the waiting applicant. Something in the man's expectant attitude as he leant anxiously forward, the undisguised trouble in the rugged face, decided him, little as it was his wont to be swayed by emotional appeals. "I'll go with you," he said, briefly. "Is it surgical?"

"No, sir. And we don't live far from here. My name's Martin."

His childlike sigh of relief, his grateful voice and manner, again somehow touched the physician, inured as he was to such responses. He glanced again with a degree of personal interest at the workman's rough, excited features, but as he turned back to his office for his doctor's bag his eyes fell on his desk with the open letter, and he paused to roll the desk lid down, locking the contents in, the old look of gravity and preoccupation settling back upon his face. Mechanically he followed Martin from the house, and in absorbed silence walked by his side through the dark streets. It was a cool summer night, gloomy with clouds that drooped low over the earth, hiding the stars. A light wind with a promise of rain in its gusty breath swept by, making the great globes of the arc-lights that lit the town sway and swing on their wire ropes. The pretty, mysterious shadows of the leaves cast down by the white light twisted into constantly varying shapes and symbols under their feet. As they passed beneath one of the swinging lamps, Dr. Gilbert raised his eyes and paused involuntarily. The globe hung opposite a stately Colonial house, lighting brilliantly the old-fashioned, white-pillared front and the beautiful garden laid out before it. Martin looked up also.

"There ain't another garden like it in this town!" he said, with an air as of personal pride and the sudden ease and loquacity born of that possession. "Half the flowers wild, an' kinder blowy vines, but there ain't a garden touches it! Seems to me garden flowers oughter sit tight and smell hard, but she—she won't have it so!" He seemed to wait for a reply.

"It is a beautiful garden," said Dr. Gilbert. The forced constraint of his tone must have caught his own ear, for he added, indifferently, "Yes, it is beautiful," and moved on. Martin nodded agreement, his eyes roving back over the spread of grass and flowers, seen clearly in the bright electric glare.

"She moves in all the wild ones nights," he volunteered, his thumb jerked over his shoulder towards the garden. His tone was partly indulgent, partly proud of the whim. "She's got a notion they do better. Kinder sneaks 'em in when they're 'sleep. I do all her movin' for her after-hours — she pays me. I ought to know how. My wife's kep' me cartin' in wood vines and weeds and such truck to our yard ever since we had one. Take 'em up easy and quiet, plenty o' dirt to the roots, you can move 'em anywhere, any time."

Dr. Gilbert heard, but it was not in the present that he was moving. Was there a foot of this garden they were passing that he did not know? Every vine, every flower, every blossom, he had watched her tending until he too knew each one. In the arbor, covered with its blowy vines, at the end of the long path yonder, he had first asked her his question; and at last, under the shadow of the gnarled old garden tree, its moonlit festoons hanging low about them, she had given him her answer, pledging herself to him by every vow. What had such vows meant to her? At the first test she had failed him! He could see again her white, startled face as she lifted it from the letter he had given her to read, see it anguished, entreating, but wholly shrinking from him. At the first it had been impossible for him to believe her. She could be his only while her people were his people! Whither he went she had not the courage to follow! He had known that she was as sensitive, as clinging, and exquisitely dependent as the flowers she tended. He was to learn that she was also as tenaciously rooted. Those delicate tendrils which she had wound shyly, but as he had believed inextricably, about his strength she was able to unfold, to draw back again to herself, the moment that strength threatened her uprooting. Her tenacity of purpose bewildered him, shocked him, outraged all his ideals of her tender womanliness, her selfless love. Fixed as it was frightened and wordless, neither his argument nor his tenderness could shake her resolution. Nor did it yield at his final test. She had

wept and trembled, but in the last appeal turned from him, and then it was that he left her—forever?

Dr. Gilbert hurried his footsteps past the house and its garden of memories. Opposite the side wing of the old mansion rose the older garden tree, screening the windows from the street with its dress of green leaves, aided by a dense vine that had crawled from trunk to crown, twisting about the gaunt limbs, and looping down in giant swings, from which, again, hung strange bunched groups of leaves, like the mammoth clusters of grapes brought from the Land of Promise. From between two of these drooping leaf bunches an upper window looked out as from a green frame. All the other windows were dark; from this one the yellow lamp-light was streaming into the very heart of the old tree, lighting its bright leaves and brown boughs with a soft, almost startling radiance. Dr. Gilbert was walking next the house, and as the open window came suddenly into view he started and looked up with a quick anxiety in the motion, controlled as soon as shown. Of what was she thinking, wakeful also in the night?

"That's her room," said Martin, ponderously. His eyes had followed his companion's. "She likes that vine round her window. I'd just as soon sleep in a tree and be done with it."

"Where is your house?" asked Dr. Gilbert, shortly.

"Just a little way, sir," the workman answered.

At the sharpness in Dr. Gilbert's voice the man's awkwardness, his uneasy manner, had instantly returned. He was glancing at the physician furtively, as if waiting for something he watched to avert, and it was with an air of relief that he pointed ahead as they turned into the next street.

"That's the house," he said, quickening his pace.

"I remember now," said Dr. Gilbert, but his voice showed that he still spoke with an absent mind. "You have a neat, pretty place here. I noticed it when I first came to town."

"It's my wife does it," said Martin, but there was neither pride nor pleasure in the tone.

The heavy odors of the blossoms on the damp night air told Dr. Gilbert he was walking up a path luxuriantly flower-bordered. He recalled the garden with its delicate plants and graceful beauty of vines and shrubs—an unusual approach to a workman's home. Martin strode on ahead and opened the door.

"Upstairs?" asked the physician.

"Yes, sir. I'll have a light in a minute."

The house had evidently been closed for the night before its master left. The only light came from a room on the upper landing.

"Never mind," said Dr. Gilbert. "Don't bother about the lamp. I've got the step now."

He was already half-way up the stair while Martin was fumbling with the matches, and led by the light above, turned to a room on the upper landing.

"Go right in, doctor," said Martin's voice behind him, and the physician went in, glancing about the bed-room with a quick eye for whatever it might tell him. With irritated mortification he realized that, absorbed as he had been in his own thoughts, he had asked no questions of Martin, not even as to who was his patient.

He was in a room most simply yet almost delicately furnished, its neatness was so dainty. A sleeping child lay in a crib in one corner, and on the bed at the further wall lay a young woman. She was still dressed, but her clothing was partially loosened, as if she had flung herself down in an abandon of distress, too ill or too anguished to help herself further. Her face was turned from the door, half hidden in the pillow, and she did not move as their footsteps crossed the floor. Dr. Gilbert glanced at the crib, but Martin nodded towards the bed.

"It's her," he said. "My wife."

He moved to the foot-board, and stood looking down at his wife, frowning, his face heavy and disturbed. There were both uneasiness and mortification in his manner, which Dr. Gilbert noted, with a quick sense that something here was out of the usual order. From the fixed constraint of her attitude and the nervous twitching of her hand as it hung by the side of the bed he knew the woman had

heard their entrance, and would not or could not move.

"How long has she been like this?" he asked.

He drew nearer to the bed as he spoke, and to his trained and instinctive perceptions it was plain that at his closer approach the woman shrank back, her whole being closed in upon itself, as her hand had convulsively closed. Dr. Gilbert looked up inquiringly at Martin, but though he still stood at the foot-board, it was stolidly and with an air of one whose whole duty is done. He would not meet Dr. Gilbert's eyes, but was gazing obstinately aside. Dr. Gilbert was used to these strange unpractical reticences in those who had sent for him to help them, and aided by a keen eye and a positive manner, was usually successful in speedily learning what he needed to know. Now, with a slight shrug of impatience, he bent forward and slipped his hand and arm under the woman's side, his practised movement lifting her easily and bodily from among her pillows. When he laid her down again she was perforce looking up full into his face with her wide and startled blue eyes.

"That's better," he said, not unkindly. He drew a chair near the bed. "Now we can see what we are about."

What he saw as he gazed keenly at his patient was the face of a very young woman looking shockingly ill, but only, the physician thought, as prolonged hysterical weeping might give a look of illness. There was no sign of past or present physical distress. It was, in spite of its tear stains, an attractive face, and one unusually delicate for a workman's wife. In its tenderness of outline, the pointed sensitiveness of the trembling chin, the soft blue of the eyes, the timidity of expression, there was something familiar to Dr. Gilbert, and yet the face was strange to him. Under his searching, seeking regard the woman suddenly flushed hotly and sat upright.

"Tom!" she cried, desperately, her eyes fixed on her husband, "I do think you haven't told him! Oh, doctor, didn't he tell you? . Tom, how could you? Now he may be so mad at us! Oh, doctor, we couldn't have our old doctor for this. He'd just laugh at us. We didn't know *what* to do, and we couldn't seem to stop. It just kept getting worse and worse all the time. I was almost crazy." She drew herself together, trying to speak more calmly. "Nobody's, so to say, sick here, doctor. It's just that he—I—we—" She broke down and hid her face in her hands. A flash of revelation broke in on Dr. Gilbert.

"Look here!" he said, turning to the husband. "If you two have only been quarrelling, and dragged me out here in the middle of the night—" He glanced from one to the other and was answered. For a moment Dr. Gilbert was thoroughly angry; the next, in spite of himself, a saving sense of humor compelled him to laugh. "Well," he said, rising from the bed-side, "this is out of my line. Martin, you ought to have kept on to the parsonage. I'm not even a married man. It's not a doctor you want."

He looked back with a half-humorous word of parting, and as he turned he glanced again at the woman on the bed, and then stood suddenly silent and motionless, watching her. Her hands had dropped from her face, and she was lying on the pillows, her eyelids closed but sharply quivering, her lips set, the breath coming in little suffering gasps through the nostrils. As she held herself thus quiet as by force, hearing his refusal of aid with that desperate submission of the humble which always painfully impressed Dr. Gilbert whenever and wherever he saw it, again her face was curiously familiar to him, but again he knew that he saw it for the first time. As he stood thus lingering, he hardly knew why, with one of those strange, introspective flashes of prophecy to which every successful worker looks back in the history of his work, Dr. Gilbert knew that he was face to face with a crisis of his own. A moment before he would have said that his future turned on the reply he might send to the letter locked behind him in his desk. Now a startling conviction told him that the key to his future hung balanced here, on the outcome of this present moment. More than once in the midst of his work, successful as it had been, he had felt a strange chilling fear that something was lacking in himself — some essential, undefined quality called for in his labors and found wanting. The thought was weak-

ening, and as a morbid fancy he had cast it out faithfully, but too often when he left a bedside it was with the vague feeling that some unspoken need of his patient had not been met by him. He knew, as a strong man knows himself, that there was no lack of power, of grasp, of brain, of will, but at times the thought oppressed him that there was some other subtle shortage, and then it was that he vexed his soul with the question if he were peculiarly fitted for the calling which he had enthusiastically chosen, and to which his life was dedicated. As he stood in this humble room it seemed to him that at last, as in a flash of understanding, he met his doubt, unmasked to him and face to face. This aid which these simple folk in their innocence plainly asked of him was what others had more subtly asked, what as a physician he had never yet given—never sought to give. It had been both his instinct and his training to resist the emotional, to uphold the dignity of his calling above its encroachments. He knew that the instinct was safe, the training reverent, but—this aid, this personality which as a physician he had never yet rendered, at his option as he supposed, had he ever possessed it to give? His answer lay here at his hand, in what he might find himself able or unable to give to these strangers gropingly reaching out to him in their trouble. Still he hesitated. In the clear sight of his moment of balance he knew, as suddenly as inevitably, that failing here, never again would his confidence in himself be what it had been before he entered this house. Did he accept this test, something must be added to him or taken from him. As in an instant of peril, it seemed to him that scenes from his past life flashed before him, all that he had ever intensely experienced, as but so many contributions towards one decision. The haunting face that all the day had come distractingly between him and his work rose again vividly in his sight—white, tearful, imploring, as she had lifted it to his at his final appeal the moment before she turned away, shrinking from him almost in aversion. Was it possible that here, too, his shortage had been somehow answerable? Was the failure his—not hers?

Then all things outside of the four walls vanished. The worker was alone in the world with his work.

With exactly the same absorbing pang of subtle excitement, of self-watchfulness, which he remembered when confronted with his first operation, Dr. Gilbert returned deliberately to the chair by the bedside. "Tell me just what has happened," he said quietly, and looking toward the husband for reply. The workman turned toward him sharply with a questioning look, the sudden change bewildering him. Then his perturbed face cleared as it had at the office door. After a moment's thought he thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a letter.

"I s'posed she'd be pleased," he said, gruffly, shamefaced, yet with feeling; "an' she didn't do a thing but take on—just like you see her." He nodded accusingly towards the bed. "I did get kinder mad at her. I 'spose I said more'n I really meant. If there'd been any sense in it— If she'd just once said what ailed her—"

Dr. Gilbert stretched out his hand for the letter, taking it from the workman's slow fingers. He carried it to the lamp on the table, where he read it over. He read it once, turned back and read it again, and then again. When he had returned it to its envelope he still stood by the table, absently tapping the paper against his palm. His face was grave to solemnity and stern with thought, but in the penetrating eyes there was a new question, and the features seemed touched with a strange doubt, a strange emotion and mobility. When at last he came back to the bed-side and in silence gave the letter to Martin, he did not look at him, but at his wife, with a deep, interested regard. The woman lay gazing up at him, her timid, anxious soul in her childlike eyes.

"How long have you lived in this town?" he asked, and in instant response to the authority of his manner, his quiet tone of responsibility assumed, a flush of relieved tension swept over her face. Her gaze hung dependent on his steady, concentrated eyes. She answered breathlessly, with a gasping confidence,

"Oh, doctor, I was born here!"

"And you have never lived anywhere else?" Dr. Gilbert's voice was as that

of another man in his own ears. He caught himself listening to the changed inflections, with wonder at their flexible power, their persuasion. "You have never had any other home?"

"Once I was away—a week."

"Your child was born here?"

"In this room, doctor."

The same breathless suspense upon his words marked all her answers. In these homely, simple questions she seemed to be finding the support, the understanding, she needed.

"Your parents live here in town still?"

"Yes, doctor."

"And how long have you been married? How long have you lived in this house?"

"Four years."

"You and your husband planted all the flowers in the yard, didn't you? And the vines over the house? I suppose you both have spent more or less time fitting up the inside too — little things you couldn't very well take away with you?"

A deep sob, another, gaspingly broken in its depths by lack of strength, and she hid her face in her hands. Martin, at the foot of the bed, swallowed hard, and fixed his eyes on a picture high on the wall, but the device failing, he angrily brushed off the tears that rolled down his cheeks. Dr. Gilbert looked from one to the other and turned away. He was opening his bag, taking out his medicines.

"That's all right," he said, presently. "Why shouldn't she cry? Get me a glass of water, will you? After I go and she is quieter, give her this mixture. That's all. Good-night, Mrs. Martin."

In the frail houses of the humble the yard outside is the safest and the accustomed place for secret conferences. As a matter of course Martin followed the physician down stairs and to the outer steps, shutting the front door as carefully behind him as if it had been the door of an adjacent room. The soft gloom showed each the figure of the other dimly, but not the face.

"Perhaps I hadn't ought to take the offer," said the workman, huskily and dubiously. "We're gettin' on pretty well here. She's spent a heap o' time makin' a home o' the place. It's a good offer, and there's the boy to think of; but I never s'posed she'd take on like this just thinkin' o' leavin'!"

"Well, you know it now," said Dr. Gilbert, briefly.

Martin turned half aside, digging the gravel walk with his heavy heel. "Bein' my wife," he said, "I s'posed—"

Dr. Gilbert laughed a short, curious laugh. "Yes, I know exactly what you supposed, and what you did," he said. "You walked in the door, your letter open in your hand, and blurted it out to her before you got well over the door-sill. Good partnership offers don't tumble in every day, and the West isn't far off—from your point of view."

"I was hot mad at her for a time, and that's the fact," said Martin, honestly. "Only it ain't quite a partnership, doctor, nor it ain't so far as the West."

Dr. Gilbert laughed again the same short, half-angry laugh. "It's the same thing," he said. "I'd like to know why you thought you could rush in and jerk up a delicate woman like that by the roots, wave her over your head, and hurrah for the West? You tell me you know how to move plants. You ought to have known as much about moving your wife. Why didn't you break it to her gently?"

There was almost a curiosity in the tone of his question.

"It ain't the West," persisted Martin, "but I ain't goin' to drag her West or South or anywhere else she takes on like this 'bout goin' to. I was pleased myself, an' I reckoned she'd be. I guess I did tell it to her too fast; but when a woman's your wife— If she'd been just my sweetheart—"

"You might have done exactly the same," said Dr. Gilbert, slowly.

He stretched out his hand suddenly in the darkness and laid it on the workman's shoulder. When he had discovered it he could not tell, but he knew now that the childlike face on the pillow in this humble house had been familiar to him only because it had worn the same haunting look of imploring fright that had been on the sensitive face lifted to him in the stately house under the shadow of the old garden tree in that moment before they two had parted. Dr. Gilbert's hand lingered where it had fallen. The

gesture had in it as much of seeking as of giving. He was conscious that for the first time in his self-dependent life he touched a fellow-being thus; but the stream that has once begun to draw from long-sealed springs is quickly the river. They both stood silent.

"Ought I to give it up, sir?"

"No," said Dr. Gilbert, slowly—"no, I think not." He spoke more as if arranging his thoughts aloud than talking to another. "I think the trouble was in the way you first told her. If you had then understood all that you were asking of her, you would have told her quite differently. You do understand now."

Martin shook his head heavily. "That's all right for you, sir. You got edgecation; you know how to say things different ways. I'd say 'em to her your way fast enough if I knew how."

"I don't know that," said Dr. Gilbert, quickly. "You don't know it yourself."

He was silent so long that Martin moved uneasily, trying to see his face; and then, with a curious diffidence of tone, Dr. Gilbert went on, but hesitatingly, as if feeling both for thoughts and the words to express them:

"Since you ask me—since you called me in for this—if I were in your place, if I had made your mistake, I think I should first plainly confess to myself that I had been a brute, and then I'd go to her—to my wife—and tell her I—tell her you are ashamed of yourself. Then—here I know I am right—I would not hurry her in any way. Tell her she may stay here with her father and mother until she is quite ready to follow you. A man must of course go where his work calls him, and if his wife isn't willing to follow him—the chances all are it's his own fault somehow."

The unwonted hesitation dropped from Dr. Gilbert's voice and manner; he was speaking again with the force, the authority which was his accustomed note, but that new power of persuasion, that depth of tone, that sympathy of inflection, was still, even in his own ears, enriching and enforcing his utterance. His hand dropped from Martin's shoulder; he stood upright, his shoulders squared, his words coming more and more incisively.

"It's not for you to make your wife go with you, Martin, but to make her *want* to go. That's the whole secret, and that's where you failed. But it's not too late to succeed—it's not too late. I am sure of that, too. Let your wife rest tonight, and to-morrow morning begin all over again as you ought to have begun today. Make her understand that until she *wants* to come to you, you will not have her come. She may tell you then that she'll follow you to the world's end—or you may have to wait for that; but wait or not, that's the one and only way to take her with you, and it's what I shall—"

Dr. Gilbert was moving hastily down the garden path. His last words came back humorously over his shoulder:

"Like it or not, that's our medicine, Martin! Good-night! Good luck!"

The Kinvad Bridge

(PERSIAN)

BY WILLIAM HURD HILLYER

At the end of the path that all men tread, at the end of the road called Time,
Where the land slopes off to the cliffs of death, and the dolorous vapors climb,
Over the cloudy gulf of hell and the chasm of dim despond,
The Kinvad Bridge swings frail and far to the heavenly heights beyond.

Nine javelins wide is the Kinvad Bridge when passeth a righteous soul;
Royally ample and safe it leads to the distant shining goal;
But when others come to the cliffs of death—ah, yes, the bridge is there—
But, oh, what a narrow thread that spans the gray gorge of despair!