

A Friend of his Youth

BY GELETT BURGESS

AS she came up the steps she saw, with almost a shock, that the crape had been removed from the door; the last three days had bridged a gulf so deep that she had lost all count of time, and the interval had seemed endless. It was over now, and the new life had begun, if indeed it could be called life without him; and things would go on again somehow.

As soon as she was able to be alone she went up stairs, turned into his study, and sat down. Nothing was changed; nothing ever could be changed, perhaps, for her. She would always see the room as he had left it; she would always see him at work in the corner, with the light shining on his hands—the hands that were never idle.

It seemed very cold to her, though the sunshine came through a gap between the curtains and whitened the papers on the desk. She rang for a fire to be laid, and then went over to his leather chair. She tried at first to sit upon the arm, in the old way, but it rocked unsteadily and she could not manage it. Then she slid into the seat with a moan, and rested her cheek on her hand.

At her side on the desk was a tray filled with the pencils he had last used. She picked up a handful of them, sorting them affectionately. A few of the points were broken or dulled, and she found a pocket-knife to sharpen them, pressing her lips together tightly as she whittled at the lead. While she was so employed a servant knocked. She started, put down the pencils guiltily, and called him in.

The man entered, and after handing his mistress a number of letters, busied himself about the grate. She looked at the addresses listlessly, and then tore open the envelopes, one after another. There were resolutions from two of his clubs and a few long-named societies, formally written in terms of sympathy; there were

clippings from the journals—eulogies she dared not read, to be put aside for a calmer period—and a few belated letters of condolence from persons of note, testifying not only their admiration for the artist who had passed away, but their love for the man that they had known. She kept one letter, however, without breaking the seal, hesitated several moments, analyzing the writing, and then placed it in a drawer of the desk.

She looked up to the man who had finished at the fireplace and was about to leave. "How long have you been with Mr. Clinton, Richards?" she asked.

"Four years, ma'am," he answered.

"That was soon after he first came into town, wasn't it?"

"It was the same year, ma'am; yes, ma'am."

"You never knew him before that? You never heard of him before he employed you, did you, Richards?"

"Only through Miss Winchester, ma'am; it was her got me the place, ma'am."

"Miss Winchester—oh yes, of course!" and Mrs. Clinton was silent a moment. "Miss Winchester was always very good to you, wasn't she, Richards?" And then, before he could reply, she added, "Have you seen her often, since then?"

The man looked at her a little dubiously. "Sometimes, when she came to town, ma'am. You know she was an old friend of Mr. Clinton's, and she used to come to luncheon at his rooms, once in a while, and clear up his things for him, and like that." He spoke hesitatingly, as if he felt the antagonism of her suspicions and was on the defence. "Of course," he added. "Miss Winchester has been abroad ever since you and Mr. Clinton were married, and before that; so I haven't seen her for a long time. At least, not till to-day; she came quite early, and brought a basket of loose violets." His voice had sunk almost to a whisper.

This was the answer to a question Mrs. Clinton had not dared ask. "Yes, yes, of course they were from her," she murmured to herself. "That's all, Richards."

When he had left, she opened the desk drawer, took out the letter she had put away, and read it slowly. "If I had been sure you wanted to see me," it went, "you must know that I would have gone to you long before this. I confess that the delays of the last two months have been intentional on my part, but my failure to respond definitely to your and Herbert's invitations has been only because I did not wish to intrude, or to make you in the least degree uncomfortable. You know in just what way and to what degree Herbert and I were friends, but you must, please, be sure that I understand your feelings, magnanimous as you have shown yourself to be, and that I realize that we have little, save him, in common. But now, if I can help you, or if, for any reason, you want me, I beg you to let me know."

It was signed "Helen Winchester." There were no preliminary phrases of sympathy to impair the directness of the message, which was written in large, round, clear characters, generously spaced, in firm straight lines across the page.

Mrs. Clinton sat for a long time watching the fire that now flamed heartlessly, all but extinguished by the sunshine that had invaded the room. It had been Herbert Clinton's dearest wish that the two women whom he loved best should be friends, but to the wife, who had dreaded the meeting so long, who had expected it so often, keyed up to a courage that had so kindly been called magnanimity, the thought of seeing this friend of his youth was bitter-sweet. She did not like Helen Winchester, though she had never seen her; and she feared she never could like her, try as she might, for Herbert's sake, and much as she knew of the worth of her friendship. They were not of the same sort; they had been responsive to different sides of his character. Yet, sooner or later, they must come together for conflict or alliance; the memory of his wish demanded some attempt, at least, of fulfillment. The man they had both loved was dead, but even this might not end the jealousy against which the young

wife had so desperately fought; it might, indeed, make that feeling stronger, for she had now only the past, which she must share with her who had been an older, perhaps a better friend to him. Her nerves were overwrought by the first struggle with her grief, and if Helen Winchester were to claim too much of that sorrow, Mrs. Clinton felt that she would not be able to bear it.

But as the days of wretchedness went by they brought a mastering desire for the companionship of some one who could understand her loss, till stronger than her jealousy grew the hunger for something more of him, some reminiscence she had not worn smooth with the chafing of her emotion. She could at last wait no longer to see Herbert's old-time friend and come face to face with his past, and that part of him she had known so little.

A week after her husband's death Mrs. Clinton entered her carriage and directed the coachman to Miss Winchester's address. Helen came down to her with both arms outstretched and a kiss ready to be accepted or refused. She drew up a chair and sat, still holding her caller's hand, waiting for the first word. Her eyes showed no trace of tears, they were steady and direct under the level line of her brows; even her mouth, firmly and sensitively drawn, was in repose. Her face was earnest and sincere, suggesting a spiritual rather than a mental schooling, positive in all its lines—the lines of caste. It was Mrs. Clinton who broke the silence, and her words came simply, as if there was no other way, responding to the demand for candor Helen's look laid on her. They were not the words she had chosen, the tentative inquiries she had expected to make, with such pain, but involuntarily her heart spoke, no longer fearing the hints of her prejudice.

"I have come, first, to make an apology," she began; "to ask pardon of Herbert's dearest friend; to acknowledge my own smallness. You have been too wise not to understand, perhaps even to pity, my weakness, but I can see now, it seems to me, for the first time, how much it must have hurt you. But I hope, too, you are woman enough not to accuse me of an ordinary conventional jealousy; and if you have known—and perhaps loved—the man I have known and loved, it is only

because you have had so much, and I, somehow, so little, that I have not dared to meet you."

Miss Winchester had withdrawn a little at first, fearing her demonstrations had been too affectionate, but now she put her hand quickly on Mrs. Clinton's arm. "I know, I know all that," she said. "I know what you mean; but you have had the best—all that I never had!"

"In a way, yes, I have loved him, and I think, yes, I know he loved me. I have been his wife two years. I have shared his success, his fame, his fortune, his hopes, everything except his past. Every hour since I first knew him has brought to me, freshly, the joy and pride of his companionship, of being able to share it all with him. I think sometimes I have been too proud of him—too glad to be seen with him, too happy in the knowledge of the honor and esteem in which he was held. I have had two years of wonderful happiness, with him every day and every night; indeed, I have had more than my share. It seems wicked not to be satisfied. It is enough for a lifetime. I wonder if I deserved it all! What have I given him, Helen?"—she spoke the name timidly, for the first time. "How have I helped him? There is nothing I would not have done for him, but it was all done before I ever came into his life. I was too late! He had succeeded without any help of mine, and the loving services that I could have given, that I always longed to give, were no longer necessary. What I could do I did, almost against his will, but they were such pitifully little things, and my love was so big! I wished he were poor again, so I might show him how I cared. I was almost ashamed of the great house, and the servants, and the gowns he liked me to wear. He thought I cared for them, Helen—he really did! It was terrible to have to be so ornamental, but I knew it pleased him to have me well dressed. It was one of the few things I could do. The very first time I went to his rooms I was disappointed to find he was so comfortably provided for. I expected to find him in some funny little garret, but there he was fitted out with everything he wanted, down to a silver paper-cutter!"

Miss Winchester smiled. "He had that paper-cutter in the old days too, my

dear; he has had it ever since I have known him—almost. But I know what you mean. It did seem strange to see him after his sudden success. He enjoyed the little material evidences of it all so keenly; and yet at heart he did not care for the reward; it was the work he enjoyed. His success never spoiled him; he was always the same Herbert!"

"But you had so much, too, Helen, so much that was better and finer than what I shared. You had the comradeship of his poverty; you knew him all through that long hard fight upward, when he was unknown and wretched and ill. Oh, I have thought about it so often, and I have envied you more for the friendship you had then, than you can ever have envied me for the love I have had since! You were there, ready and willing, when he most needed a friend; but the man he was then, the man you knew and served, I never, never can know! I know he was a young, active, adorable boy all through it, as he was to the end, and you had him all to yourself. What was he like, Helen?"

The other woman's hand tightened its grasp. Her eyes were still serene, without menace of tears. She had won the battle of her emotions long since, at what cost, by what stubborn resistance and determined effort, no one would ever know, now, but her calmness was impregnable.

"What I saw in him, chiefly, in those days, was the promise of what was to come, the promise of the complete manhood you knew, far better than I. I understood his moods and his desires, his faults and his weaknesses, as well as I knew my own, but through them all, underneath them all, I saw him growing day by day nearer to my ideal of him—what I felt was best in him. But the man he was to be, the man I tried to help him to be, the man I loved as his mother loved him, him I never knew, except in promise; he was to be yours—he was made for you, born for you. I had the privilege of helping him a little, but he helped me far, far more than I ever could him, and I know you will not grudge me that!"

"Do you know what was the only way I was ever really able to help him, materially?" Mrs. Clinton said, a little bitterly. "He used to love to have me play Chopin to him in the evenings when he

was tired, but I think he considered my pencil-sharpening a greater accomplishment. It was the one thing he used to compliment me on; it always surprised him. It was the only one of the hundreds of little things a woman longs to do for the man she loves that could not be done better by some one else!"

"You must not say such things! You must not do him such an injustice. He was not the man to marry a doll-wife; I know him too well for that. Do you suppose I could be with him so long without knowing his ideals too? without knowing what his wife should be like, to help him and to satisfy him best? He was looking for you until he found you, and you filled the place in his heart that was always vacant before. I did only what any girl would have been glad to do for such a friend."

"Oh, it's just that!" cried Mrs. Clinton. "It's the little common every-day things I could not bear to think of any one else's having done for him! We were so busy and so gay that sometimes I felt it less, though I knew it was there aching in my heart; but now he is gone, I have so few actual definite personal duties to remember! I want to know all about the things you did for him, Helen, so that I may have some new way to think of him besides the way I know now. I want to know everything—all about the clothes he wore then, and what his neck-ties were like, and if his cuffs were always clean—oh, don't tell me they were!—and who darned his stockings; did you? *Did you?*" she sobbed.

Miss Winchester averted her glance, for the first time, waited a moment, and then, choking down something in her throat, said: "Yes, sometimes. When he was travelling he used to post them to me, so that I could mend them and return them to him. I made him promise to do it. Sometimes it took a week before he got them back again, because he moved about so. I loved to do it for him. It made him seem nearer."

"Of course he didn't wear silk stockings then, did he?" Mrs. Clinton said, timidly, with something between a sob and a laugh of anxious interest.

Miss Winchester smiled. "He didn't wear silk stockings. They were cheap black ones that crocked awfully."

"I want to know how he looked, too!—yes, I have all his old photographs, even that funny tintype of you and Herbert, the one where you moved twice—but it isn't that; it's the way he *really* looked—how often he shaved, and whether his hair was rumpled or smooth, usually, and the way he said things. It must have been in the same way, the same dear blessed way! I want to know the jokes he made, and his favorite expressions and quotations. Did he ever call you a Chinaman, when he was a little vexed? I used to do all sorts of things to get him to call me a Chinaman, but he hardly ever would, because he thought everything I did was perfect; and I didn't dare tell him to say it, for that would have spoilt it all!"

"No, he never called me a Chinaman," Helen replied. "That was only for you, I am sure. But he used to swear at me, sometimes, and I used to love it. I mean he used to swear to me, not at me; he used to say, 'Damn you, darling!' in the most absurd way."

"Oh, did he do that even then?" Mrs. Clinton exclaimed, with a nervous laugh and a touch of envy in her voice.

"He has told me about how often he used to come to your house for his meals, when he was poor and hated to eat alone in cheap restaurants. Didn't you just long to have him come every night?"

"I never let them lock the front door, then, so that he could walk right into the dining-room, without ringing. Of course we were delighted to have him come. He always used to say, 'Well, how is mamma's little sunshine to-day?' And I always had to fold his napkin for him; he hated to do it. He used to say the only thing he liked about restaurants was that he didn't have to do that."

"You used to go to his room, too, and clean it up for him, every week, didn't you? And you used to cook French pancakes for him on his kerosene-stove. Oh, oh, Helen, where was that? Where did he live then? To think I don't even know where he lived in those days!"

Miss Winchester gave her the name and number of the street, with many other details of the quiet suburban life the two, as girl and boy, had shared together. To all this the wife listened with affecting interest, greedy for every scrap

of information that might reveal a new phase in the character and habits of the man she loved. By degrees her calmness came back, soothed by the peace and steadfast courage of Helen's manner, and she listened to Herbert's friend as she might have listened to Herbert's mother. When it was time to go, she said:

"There are still so many things, it will take a long time to tell them all. But there is time enough, isn't there? There is my whole lifetime! You must come and see me often, Helen; no, you must come and stay with me!"

Mrs. Clinton entered her carriage and gave the driver the address of a house in one of the unfashionable suburbs of the town. As she leaned back in the cushions of her brougham the image of Helen Winchester still remained with her, restrained, self-possessed, equal to any emergency, strengthened by some philosophy that was not for the young wife to comprehend. What this attitude meant, what impulses had been fought and subdued, she could not guess. To have known such a man as Herbert Clinton, in the first enthusiasm of his youth, to have watched the dawn of his success, to have stood with him, side by side, before ever the world knew him, and, above all, to have had the chance to serve him in the ways Helen had confessed—actions trivial, but capable of being beautified by so much sentiment—how could any woman have failed to care for him more and more tenderly, and how could he but have been affected by the fineness, the firmness, and loyalty of such a spirit as Helen's. The uncasiness in Mrs. Clinton's heart, allayed momentarily by the sight of Helen's face, troubled her again with a new suspicion. She felt herself somehow inferior in power and simplicity, and she could not help wondering what had been between these two. She had never dared ask her husband, specifically; she had never let him speak of Helen Winchester any more than was possible. But, though before she had never been jealous of anything but his friendship, it seemed to her, now, that there must have been some sort of an understanding, and in that, whatever it was, she could have no part. She had come in at the second act of the play, and she could not understand.

The carriage drew up at last before a

three-story house in one of the meaner streets of the suburb, and Mrs. Clinton, alighting, rapped at the door. It was opened by an old woman whose arms were lathered with suds. She eyed her caller, and the carriage at the door, with frank curiosity.

"I would like to know if the little room you have on the third floor in the rear is vacant. If it is, I should like very much to see it."

"Well, mum," replied the landlady, wiping her arms on her apron, "it is, and it isn't. There's a lodger what ought to be moved out by this time last Tuesday, but his things is there yet, and the room's well cluttered up with the rubbish he left behind. Was you thinking of taking the room for yourself, mum—or more likely it's for a friend?"

"I wanted merely to see the room for a few moments, that is all. Miss Winchester said that you probably would have no objections," said Mrs. Clinton, opening her purse. -

"No, thank ye, mum; keep your money in your pocket; Miss Winchester's name is enough for me, and any friend of hers is as welcome as the day, for the sake of old times, even if she hadn't stood by me more than once since then, when I needed it bad. Come up this way, mum. Mind the bucket on the landing!"

They passed up two narrow flights of stairs, and, at the top, under a roof skylight, the landlady threw open a door, saying: "Here's the room, and it's a pig-sty it is, for I haven't had a chance to clean it for the young man's truck. But I can't see, for the life o' me, what you want to see the place for!"

"Miss Winchester has told me that Mr. Clinton used to live here." Mrs. Clinton spoke with an effort after a first swift glance into the dingy little room.

"He did that, mum, as Miss Winchester has good rights to know, for many's the time she's been up here, scrubbing out the place, and calling over the banisters down stairs for hot water, and the two of them laughing like kiddies with their pranks. Not that I couldn't have kep' it clean enough myself, mind you, but Miss Winchester, she would do it, and insist on helping with the windows and all. Them very curtains that's there now, she made 'em, and they're like to last a good five

years more. That was in the old days, though, you understand, mum; they say Master Clinton has made a big name for himself since then, and has got rich. I never seen him since he left, five years ago. Be you a friend of his, mum, if I may ask?"

"Mr. Clinton died last week," the other said, simply. She had gone to the dirty little window, and was looking out over the roofs.

"Oh, but it's sorry I am to hear it!" said the old woman. "He was a fine lad, and he had a big heart in him; I was sorry enough when he left here. He was full of his tricks, though, and he used to plague the very life out o' me with his nonsense, sayin' I was good-lookin', an' me a widow woman with six children! 'It's a dead good-looker ye are, Mrs. Murphy!' says he, many's the time, till I had to take the broom to him! He never give me a warm word, though; he was always ready with his rent, too, though I found out since that he had to hang up his fiddle more than the once at the pawn-shop to pay me of a Saturday. I wonder, now, who he's left his money to? Miss Winchester, perhaps. She was a good friend to him; no lad ever had better; though it's few friends he had in those days, by the same token. I've wondered he didn't marry Miss Winchester; and she did too, I've no doubt, for she thought the world of him, and she didn't take her eyes off of him except to lay 'em on something of his that needed to be done by a woman's hand. But it's the way of a man never to know who loves him most till it's too late. Maybe he'll have been married long before this, d'ye know? He was fond o' children, and he was always good to my Teddy when I couldn't manage the boy myself. Them kind generally marries."

A clamor from below arose before the other could reply, and Mrs. Murphy left her caller in the room and clattered down stairs to answer the summons. Mrs. Clinton took a seat upon one of the trunks, removed her veil to dry her eyes, and looked around the little chamber. . . .

It was some time afterward that she closed the door gently, brushed the dust from her gloves, soiled with the grime of the furnishings, and went down into the lower hall. She was met by the landlady, who insisted on her caller's having "a

bite and a sup" with her before leaving, in the dark and crowded apartment she called her sitting-room. There was enough in Mrs. Clinton's manner to forbid questioning, even if Mrs. Murphy had not been quick to see traces of tears in the young woman's face. Whatever were her conclusions, however, she kept them to herself, and the evidences of Mrs. Clinton's emotion made her the more prodigal in her offers of refreshment. When the tea had been drunk she apologized for a brief absence, and after several minutes reappeared, carrying a package clumsily enveloped in old newspapers.

"It's a curious thing, now, that you should be coming to see the room to-day," she said, as she opened the wrappings. "This here box belonged to Mr. Clinton; I seen him a-making of it hisself, long ago—six years, it must be. He kep' it down in the cellar along with some of his traps, on account of his room being so small, and he must of clean forgot it when he went away. It got shoved in back somewhere out of sight, and I never laid eyes on it till last spring, when they tore up the water-pipes in the kitchen. What with Miss Winchester's being away, and me not knowing nothing about Mr. Clinton's whereabouts, I never knew what to do with it, and I kep' it ever since, thinking to hear some time from him or her."

She showed a small trunk, covered with calf-skin of brindled red and white hair, bound with copper, and studded with brass nails, the work of a patient amateur. It was fastened with the sort of padlock usually seen on dog-collars, and upon the top of the cover were the letters "H. C."

"I don't suppose there's nothing in it worth saving, or else he would have remembered it," said Mrs. Murphy; "but you'll take notice it is still locked, and it 'ain't never been opened. So if you'll take it to Miss Winchester, or whoever 'll be having the rights to it, 'twill be doing me a great favor, mum."

Mrs. Clinton took the box in her arms lovingly, as a mother might hold a child. It was a precious legacy of her husband's youth, strangely found, and packed with many affecting possibilities. A word from her, as she left, brought the tears to Mrs. Murphy's eyes.

"Oh, mum, I knew you'd be the wife when ye came down the stairs and I saw the dust on your face! 'She's had her lips to the winder-pane, the pore lady,' I says to myself, 'and she's one that has loved the boy, an' had the rights to.' But it wasn't for the likes o' me to speak until ye said the word, but now I tell ye ye've lost one o' the finest lads that was ever raised without a mother, an' a gentleman down to the heels of him, as I know well!"

There was a locksmith's shop on the corner of the street, and here Mrs. Clinton walked immediately after and had the hasp of the box filed free of the staple. This done, she re-entered her brougham, and ordered her man to drive home.

As the carriage sped through the suburbs into town she laid the little trunk upon her knees and excitedly lifted the lid. She could hope, now, to have from him some secrets never before shared; she might imagine herself, too, a friend of his youth, and rejoice in the intimacy of the spirited boy she had never seen. And there might perhaps be some clew. Surely she had a right to know—he had never kept anything from her.

There was a miscellaneous assortment of papers, notes, and trinkets, a collection that undoubtedly dated from Herbert's boyhood; the sort of treasures a young man would put away as priceless mementos and soon forget, absorbed in newer, stronger sensations. She handled them delicately, with many pauses to catch her breath as the keepsakes recalled his familiar stories. She came at last to a small packet of letters, tied with a red silk cord. These had been taken from their envelopes, and the outer sheet showed a line of firm round handwriting, so legible that, without meaning to read, a phrase caught her eye. "*She will give you what I cannot give,*" it said.

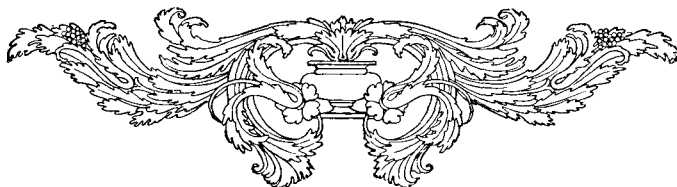
She untied the knot hurriedly, as if afraid, though still in her carriage, of

being watched. The writing covered but two pages, and there was neither date nor signature; there was only a little hieroglyph at the end, but this she recognized, as well as the appearance of the script. The note ran as follows:

"When you asked me the question, this afternoon, I put off your answer till I could write more calmly, for I had not the courage to tell you what now I must say. I had not only you to refuse, but my own heart as well. I love you too much to marry you! That I have loved you from the beginning, and shall to the end, you would have seen long before now, if you had not been, man-like, so blind, and so interested in trying to make yourself fall in love with me. But you have seen me in every mood; we have worked and played together, and you have not yet really cared for me in that only way, the way that lasts. I could never satisfy you and give you peace. Don't deny this, Herbert, for I know it is true. We have had a blessed friendship, and that, please God, may always continue, for we must both forget this chapter. Some day a woman will come into your life who will move you and kindle you, and make you understand all that I understand now. She will give you what I cannot give, she will give you *the power to love*, a far, far greater gift than mine of loving. It is so much greater to love than to be loved! If I cannot have both, then at least I can have the greater part, so I give you my companionship still with a glad heart. When she comes, let me, if I may, be the first to welcome her; till then forget my confession. Do not let me regret having been too honest."

Mrs. Clinton folded the letter and put it back into the packet, slowly, very slowly, tying the red silk cord. Then she closed the trunk, and rapped upon the front window of her carriage.

"Drive back to Miss Winchester's house!" she said to the coachman.



Editor's Easy Chair.

ONE morning, not long ago, as the light streamed in at the windows of the editor's den, taking a soft, stained-glass tone from its passage through the smoke and steam of the elevated trains, the Easy Chair had one of those Memnonian moments which experience is beginning to teach the editor to expect of it, from time to time. Of course when it actually spoke he knew that it was the tradition of the Easy Chair finding words, and he tried to answer in the reverence which he always tries to feel for a tradition: he is beginning to be a tradition himself.

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"Have you ever," the Easy Chair asked, "had your doubts whether a book was especially worth reading because its sale had reached a hundred thousand, or two, or even five hundred thousand?"

The editor looked warily about the den, and seeing that he was quite alone with the Easy Chair, he confessed, "Yes; I have already expressed grave doubts of that sort, but nobody else seems to have them, and as I do not like to be odd, I do not keep insisting upon mine."

"I am not sure you are right," said the Easy Chair. "Perhaps other people have them, and if you insisted upon them, you would not find yourself so odd, after all. Is the fact that a book has not sold half a million copies proof that it is poor literature?"

"I should be sorry to think so," said the editor. "I have written books, and I am afraid it would rule mine out, except in the very few cases where they have passed that figure."

"But would you like to have written the books that sell half a million? Candidly, now!"

"Candidly, then, I wouldn't. But I would rather write them than read them; I think it would be easier. A certain kind of man would write one of the recent enormous successes, because if he wished to write at all, he would have no choice but to write that kind of book. He would be made so, but no one could

be imaginably made so that he must read such a book, in the sense that the author must write it."

"I don't know about that," said the Easy Chair, musingly. "The fact that there are two or three or ten or twenty men who must write trashy books possibly implies the fact that there are two or three or twenty millions who must read them. Have you any philosophy as to the vast popularity of the books that have been lately filling the world with the noise of their publicity? It used to be called advertising, but I rather like the Gallic neatness of the new word."

"No, unless it is the publicity that does it. Only, the publicity seems not to come first, always."

"It can't be the publicity that does it, then, though the publicity helps. The thing seems largely meteorological. It is scarcely more an affair of volition than the weather. A certain atmospheric pressure in the material world causes it to rain water, and a certain atmospheric pressure in the literary world causes it to rain rubbish. We suppose that in both cases the rain comes from the clouds, from above, but in both cases it comes primarily from the ground, from below. What you want to do in order to account for the literary rubbish which now prevails is not to analyze the authors, who are the mere modes of its discharge, but to ascertain the condition of their readers, from whom they received it as an imperceptible exhalation, and who receive it back from the authors in an appreciable form."

"Oh, it's all very well to say that," the editor protested. "But the causes are so recondite that no inquiry can reach them, and one conjecture would be as good as another. The phenomenon is not only extraordinary in quality, but in quantity. The rubbish is not only rubbish, but it is rubbish in vaster amount than ever before. It is as if the rainfall should have been all at once increased tenfold over the whole territory of the United States. The rubbish-fall in the