

The gloom deepened in the post office. An exploit which would certainly have added lustre to the achievements of the local Republicans had it been confined to the raiding of the Colonel's guns had degenerated into a common burglary, a crime without precedent in the country districts in Ireland.

'A low pack of robbers,' said the 'Boots.'

'It must have been strangers,' suggested the Postmistress.

A gleam of hopefulness radiated through the post office. It was significant of Celtic mentality that, while everybody was perfectly aware of their identity, under no circumstances would Cloonarea betray its criminals. An incident had occurred of which it was thoroughly ashamed. Under the circumstances Cloonarea decided to accept no responsibility for it.

'Strangers it was that done it,' everybody agreed with everybody else. 'Only a pack of common robbers would take money.'

The crowd dispersed hopefully down the road.

The west wind was blowing softly across the bog. The lake lay shimmering in the April sunshine, its shores ablaze with golden gorse.

An armored car, symbol of Britain's might, sent in response to the Colonel's telegraphic appeal to the forces of the Crown, lay helplessly across the road. Soldiers in tin hats hurried, with harassed countenances, inside and outside and around it. A youthful officer philosophically smoked a cigarette in the ditch. The gray, unwieldy monster, constructed to move with equal facility backwards and forwards and sideways, could not be prevailed upon to travel in any direction whatsoever. A 'Ford' car, containing four policemen, paused to offer suggestions to the soldiers. The Protestant rector dis-

mounted from his bicycle to discuss the outrage with the youthful officer.

'It almost makes me forget that I'm a Christian,' he remarked; 'I should like to shoot the scoundrels. Imagine taking *money!*'

At the house the Colonel was explaining to the county inspector. 'It's not the bally guns I mind (my best ones I sent long ago to the barracks), but that they should take my money and my watch — good God, sir, what is the country coming to?'

The Outlook

THE LITTLE BEGGAR

BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

HE was on his way from his bachelor flat to the Club, a man of middle age, with a slight stoop, and an expression of face firm yet gentle, the blue eyes with light and courage in them, and a faint hint of melancholy — or was it resignation? — about the strong mouth. It was early in April, a slight drizzle of warm rain falling through the coming dusk; but spring was in the air, a bird sang rapturously on a pavement tree. And the man's heart awakened at the sound, for it was the lift of the year, and low in the western sky above the London roofs there was a band of delicious color.

His way led him past one of the great terminal stations that open the gates of London seawards; the bird, the colored clouds, and the thought of a sunny coast-line worked simultaneously in his heart. These messages of spring woke music in him. The music, however, found no expression beyond a quiet sigh, so quiet that not even a child, had he carried one in his big arms, need have noticed it. His pace quickened, his figure straightened up, he lifted his eyes — with new light in them. And upon the wet pavement,

where the street lamps already laid their network of faint gold, he saw, perhaps a dozen yards in front of him, the figure of a little boy. The boy, for some reason, caught his attention and his interest vividly. He was dressed in Etons, the broad white collar rumped, the pointed coat hitched sideways a little, while from beneath the rather grimy straw hat his thick light hair escaped at various angles. This general air of effort and distress was due to the fact that the little fellow was struggling with a bag, packed apparently to bursting point, too big and heavy for him to manage for more than ten yards at a time. He changed it from one hand to the other, resting it in the intervals upon the ground, each effort making it rub against his leg, so that the trousers were hoisted thereby considerably above the boot. 'I must help him,' said the man. 'He'll never get there at this rate. He'll miss his train to the sea.' For his destination was obvious, since a pair of wooden spades was tied clumsily and insecurely to the straps of the bursting bag.

Occasionally, too, the lad — he seemed about ten years old — looked about him to right and left, questioningly, anxiously, as though he expected someone, someone to help him or perhaps to meet him. His behavior gave the impression even that he was not quite sure of his way. The man hurried a little to overtake him. 'I really must give the little beggar a hand,' he repeated to himself as he went. He smiled. The fatherly, protective side of him, strong naturally, was touched. The smile broadened into a jolly laugh as he came up against the great stuffed bag, now resting on the pavement, its owner beside it looking alternately to left and right. At which instant exactly the boy, hearing his step, turned round, and, for the first

time, looked him full in the face with a pair of big blue eyes that held unabashed and happy welcome in them.

'Oh, I say, Sir, it's most awfully ripping of you,' he said, in a confiding voice, before the man had time to speak. 'I hunted everywhere, but I never thought of looking behind me.'

But the man, standing dumb for a few seconds beside the little fellow, missed the latter sentence altogether, for there was in the clear blue eyes an expression so trustful, so frankly affectionate almost, and in the voice music of so natural a kind, that all the tenderness in him rose like a sudden tide, and he yearned toward the boy as though he were his little son. Thought in him, born of some sudden revival of emotion, flashed back swiftly across a stretch of twelve blank years — and for an instant the lines of the mouth seemed deeper, though the light in the eyes grew softer, brighter.

'It's too big for you, my boy,' he said, recovering himself with a jolly laugh, 'or rather you're not big enough — yet — for it. Eh? Where to? The station, I suppose?' And he stooped to grasp the handle of the bulging bag, first poking the spades more securely in beneath the straps; but in doing so became aware that something the boy had said gave him pain. What was it? Why was it? So swift is thought that, even while he stooped, and before his hand actually touched the leather, he had found what hurt him: the word 'Sir.' It made him feel like a schoolmaster or a tutor; it made him feel old; it was not the word he needed and — yes — had longed for. And there was such strange trouble in his mind and heart that, as he grasped the bag, he did not catch the boy's rejoinder to his question. Of course, though, it must be the railway station. He was going to the seaside for Easter. His people would be at

the ticket office, waiting for him. Bracing himself a little for the effort, he seized the leather handles and lifted the bag from the ground.

'Oh, thanks awfully, Sir,' repeated the boy, with a schoolboy grin of gratitude, and yet a true urchin's sense that the proper thing had happened, since such jobs were for grown-up men, of course. And this time, though he used the objectionable word, the voice betrayed recognition of the fact that somehow he had a right to look to this particular man for help, and that this particular man did the right and natural thing in giving help.

But the man, meanwhile, swayed sideways and nearly lost his balance. He had calculated automatically the probable energy necessary to lift the weight; he had put this energy forth. He received a shock as though he had been struck, for the bag had no weight at all; it was light as a feather. It might have been of tissue paper, a phantom bag. And the shock was mental as well as physical. His mind swayed with his body.

'By Jove!' cried the boy, strutting merrily beside him, hands in his pockets. 'Thanks awfully. This *is* jolly!' And this time the objectionable word was omitted.

But a mist swam before the other's eyes, the street lamps grew blurred, the drizzle thickened in the air. He still heard the bird's wild song, still knew the west had gold upon its lips; it was the rest of the world about him that now seemed dim. Strange thoughts rose in a cloud. Reality and dream played games, the games of childhood, through his heart. Memories, robed flamingly, trooped past his inner sight, closing his eyelids for a moment to the outer world. Rossetti came to him, singing too sweetly a hidden pain in perfect words across those blank twelve years: 'The hour that might have been,

yet might not be, Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore, Yet whereof Time was barren. . . .'

Mingled with these — all in an instant of time — came practical thoughts as well. This boy, the ridiculous effort he made to carry this ridiculously light bag! The poignant tenderness, the awakened yearning! Was it a girl dressed up? The happy face, the innocent, confiding smile, the music in the voice, the dear soft blue eyes — yet something, some indescribable, incalculable element lacking after all. He felt this curious lack. What was it? He glanced down as they moved side by side. He felt shy, hopeful, marvelously tender. His heart yearned inexpressibly, and the boy, looking elsewhere, did not notice the examination, did not notice, of course, that his companion also caught his breath, and that he walked uncertainly. But the man was troubled, for the face reminded him, as he gazed, of many children, children he had loved and played with, both boys *and* girls, his Substitute Children, as he had always called them in his heart. The boy, then, suddenly came closer and took his arm. They were close upon the station now. The sweet human perfume of a small, deeply loved, helpless, and dependent little life rose past his face.

He suddenly blurted out: 'But this bag of yours — it weighs simply nothing!' The boy laughed — a ring of true careless joy was in the sound. He looked up. 'Do you know what's in it? Shall I tell you?' He added in a whisper: 'I will, if you like.' But the man was afraid suddenly and dared not ask.

'Brown paper probably,' he evaded laughingly; 'or birds' eggs. You've been up to some wicked lark or other.'

The little chap clasped both hands upon the supporting arm. He took a quick, dancing step or two, then stopped dead, and made the man stop

with him. He rose on tiptoe to reach the distant ear. His face wore a lovely smile of truth and trust and delight.

'My future,' he whispered.

And the words turned the man into ice.

They entered the great station. The last of the daylight was shut out. They reached the ticket office. The crowds of hurrying people surged round them. The man set down the bag. For a moment or two the boy looked about him to right and left, searching, then turned his big blue eyes upon the other with a radiant smile.

'She's in the waiting room as usual,' he said. 'I'll go and fetch her — though she *ought* to know you're here.' He stood upon tiptoe, his hands upon the other's shoulders, his face thrust close. 'Kiss me, father, I shan't be a sec.'

'You little beggar!' said the man in a voice he could not control quite. Then, opening his big arms wide, saw only an empty space before him. He turned and walked slowly back to his flat instead of to the Club, and when he got home he read over for the thousandth time the letter in which she had accepted his love — the ink a little faded during the twelve years intervening — two brief weeks before death took her.

The Saturday Westminster Gazette

A REALIST IN SYRIA

BY BRAVIDA

THE truth, in Syria, is rare. It would appear also, from what is being said in Europe, at Peace Conferences and elsewhere, that the truth *about* Syria is no less so.

We are supposed to be witnessing the dawn of popular diplomacy. This, as it affects Syria, means, I take it, that what is going to be done with Syria will be what the peoples of the

Entente decide, modified by what the peoples of Syria desire. It will be no easy matter to arrange, because the peoples of the Entente know nothing about Syria, while the people of Syria have certainly given no mandate to anybody at the Peace Conference to voice their desires.

There are at least three parties in Syria with distinct views as to the future of the heterogeneous collection of peoples who inhabit that promising country. No effort has been made, or could possibly be made at this stage, to ascertain which is the most numerous. There are too many British troops about for any test — however much some of them might desire it — of which is the most powerful. There may be minor points of doubt, but the one salient fact at the moment is that nobody, however learned, however familiar with the Syrian peoples, can say that he represents them all, or estimate how many of them he does represent.

The rich, as far as one can see, are in favor of the British. But they are, for the most part, quite unworthy of being asked what they want. There are good people in Hell, as Sancho Panza says; but by far the greater part of the rich people of Syria — I am speaking of the natives — have battered on the poor, oppressed them, and reduced them to a misery so abject that it would do people with a grievance good to see them, as a lesson in what real misery is like. 'In a climate soft as a mother's smile, on a soil fruitful as God's love, the Irish peasant mourns,' they used to say. The Syrian peasant has a climate and a soil which (from the purely utilitarian point of view only, of course) make Ireland look like an outlying bit of Labrador; but if he had the rights, and the life, of Irish peasants in the worst of those bad old times, he would say the millennium had dawned upon him. But enough of the poorest. We will come to them later on.