

THE LITTLE WHITE BIRD

OR, ADVENTURES IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

BY J. M. BARRIE

XVIII

WILLIAM PATERSON



WE had been together, we three, in my rooms, David telling me about the fairy language and Porthos lolling on the sofa listening, as one may say. It is his favorite place of a dull day, and under him were some sheets of newspaper, which I spread there at such times to deceive my housekeeper, who thinks dogs should lie on the floor.

Fairy me tribber is what you say to the fairies when you want them to give you a cup of tea, but it is not so easy as it looks, for all the *r's* should be pronounced as *w's*, and I forget this so often that David believes I should find difficulty in making myself understood.

"What would you say," he asked me, "if you wanted them to turn you into a hollyhock?" He thinks the ease with which they can turn you into things is their most engaging quality.

The answer is *Fairy me lukka*, but though he had often told me this I again forgot the *lukka*.

"I should never dream," I said (to cover my discomfiture), "of asking them to turn me into anything. If I was a hollyhock I should soon wither, David."

He himself had provided me with this objection not long before, but now he seemed to think it merely silly. "Just before the time to wither begins," he said airily, "you say to them *Fairy me bola*."

Fairy me bola means "Turn me back again," and David's discovery made me uncomfortable, for I knew he had hitherto kept his distance of the fairies mainly because of a feeling that their conversions are permanent.

So I returned him to his home. I send him home from my rooms under the

care of Porthos. I may walk on the other side unknown to them, but they have no need of me, for at such times nothing would induce Porthos to depart from the care of David. If anyone addresses them he growls softly and shows the teeth that crunch bones as if they were biscuits. Thus amicably the two pass on to Mary's house, where Porthos barks his knock-and-ring bark till the door is opened. Sometimes he goes in with David, but on this occasion he said good-by on the step. Nothing remarkable in this, but he did not return to me, not that day nor next day nor in weeks and months. I was a man distraught; and David wore his knuckles in his eyes. Conceive it, we had lost our dear Porthos—at least—well—something disquieting happened. I don't quite know what to think of it even now. I know what David thinks. However, you shall think as you choose.

My first hope was that Porthos had strolled to the Gardens and got locked in for the night, and almost as soon as Lock-out was over I was there to make inquiries. But there was no news of Porthos, though I learned that someone was believed to have spent the night in the Gardens, a young gentleman who walked out hastily the moment the gates were opened. He had said nothing, however, of having seen a dog. I feared an accident now, for I knew no thief could steal him, yet even an accident seemed incredible, he was always so cautious at crossings; also there could not possibly have been an accident to Porthos without there being an accident to something else.

David in the middle of his games would suddenly remember the great blank, and step aside to cry. It was one of his qualities that when he knew he was about to cry he turned aside to do it and I always respected his privacy and waited for him. Of course being but a little boy he was soon playing again, but his sudden floods

of feeling, of which we never spoke, were dear to me in those desolate days.

We had a favorite haunt, called the Story-seat, and we went back to that, meaning not to look at the grass near it where Porthos used to squat, but we could not help looking at it sideways, and to our distress a man was sitting on the acquainted spot. He rose at our approach and took two steps toward us, so quick that they were almost jumps, then as he saw that we were passing indignantly I thought I heard him give a little cry.

I put him down for one of your garrulous fellows who try to lure strangers into talk, but next day, when we found him sitting on the Story-seat itself, I had a longer scrutiny of him. He was dandiacally dressed, seemed to tell something under twenty years and had a handsome wistful face atop of a heavy lumbering, almost corpulent figure, which however did not betoken inactivity; for David's purple hat (a conceit of his mother's of which we were both heartily ashamed) blowing off as we neared him he leapt the railings without touching them and was back with it in three seconds; only instead of delivering it straightway he seemed to expect David to chase him for it.

You have introduced yourself to David when you jump the railings without touching them, and William Paterson (as proved to be his name) was at once our friend. We often found him waiting for us at the Story-seat, and the great stout fellow laughed and wept over our tales like a three-year-old. Often he said with extraordinary pride, "You are telling the story to me quite as much as to David, aren't you?" He was of an innocence such as you shall seldom encounter, and believed stories at which even David blinked. Often he looked at me in quick alarm if David said that of course these things did not really happen, and unable to resist that appeal I would reply that they really did. I never saw him irate except when David was still sceptical, but then he would say quite warningly "*He* says it is true, so it must be true." This brings me to that one of his qualities, which at once gratified and pained me, his admiration for myself. His eyes, which at times had a rim of red, were ever fixed upon

me fondly except perhaps when I told him of Porthos and said that death alone could have kept him so long from my side. Then Paterson's sympathy was such that he had to look away. He was shy of speaking of himself so I asked him no personal questions, but concluded that his upbringing must have been lonely, to account for his ignorance of affairs, and loveless, else how could he have felt such a drawing to me?

I remember very well the day when the strange, and surely monstrous, suspicion first made my head tingle. We had been blown, the three of us, to my rooms by a gust of rain; it was also, I think, the first time Paterson had entered them. "Take the sofa, Mr. Paterson," I said, as I drew a chair nearer to the fire, and for the moment my eyes were off him. Then I saw that, before sitting down on the sofa, he was spreading the day's paper over it. "Whatever makes you do that?" I asked, and he started like one bewildered by the question, then went white and pushed the paper aside.

David had noticed nothing, but I was strangely uncomfortable, and, despite my efforts at talk, often lapsed into silence, to be roused from it by a feeling that Paterson was looking at me covertly. Pooh! what vapors of the imagination were these. I blew them from me, and to prove to myself, so to speak, that they were dissipated, I asked him to see David home. As soon as I was alone, I flung me down on the floor laughing, then as quickly jumped up and was after them, and very sober too, for it was come to me abruptly as an odd thing that Paterson had set off without asking where David lived.

Seeing them in front of me, I crossed the street and followed. They were walking side by side rather solemnly, and perhaps nothing remarkable happened until they reached David's door. I say perhaps, for something did occur. A lady, who has several pretty reasons for frequenting the Gardens, recognized David in the street, and was stooping to address him, when Paterson did something that alarmed her. I was too far off to see what it was, but had he growled "Hands off!" she could not have scurried away more precipitately. He then ponderously marched his charge to the door, where,

assuredly, he did a strange thing. Instead of knocking or ringing, he stood on the step and called out sharply, "Hie, hie, hie!" until the door was opened.

The whimsy, for it could be nothing more, curtailed me of my sleep that night, and you may picture me trying both sides of the pillow.

I recalled other queer things of Paterson, and they came back to me charged with new meanings. There was his way of shaking hands. He now did it in the ordinary way, but when first we knew him his arm had described a circle, and the hand had sometimes missed mine and come heavily upon my chest instead. His walk, again, might more correctly have been called a waddle.

There were his perfervid thanks. He seldom departed without thanking me with an intensity that was out of proportion to the little I had done for him. In the Gardens, too, he seemed ever to take the sward rather than the seats, perhaps a wise preference, but he had an unusual way of sitting down. I can describe it only by saying that he let go of himself and went down with a thud.

I reverted to the occasion when he lunched with me at the Club. We had cutlets, and I noticed that he ate his in a somewhat finicking manner; yet having left the table for a moment to consult the sweets-card, I saw, when I returned, that there was now no bone on his plate. The waiters were looking at him rather curiously.

David was very partial to him, but showed it in a somewhat singular manner, used to pat his head, for instance. I remembered, also, that while David shouted to me or Irene to attract our attention, he usually whistled to Paterson, he could not explain why.

These ghosts made me to sweat in bed, not merely that night, but often when some new shock brought them back in force, yet, unsupported, they would have disturbed me little by day. Day, however, had its reflections, and they came to me while I was shaving, that ten minutes when, brought face to face with the harsher realities of life, we see things most clearly as they are. Then the beautiful nature of Paterson loomed offensively, and his honest eyes insulted over me. No

one come to nigh twenty years had a right to such faith in his fellow-creatures. He could not backbite, nor envy, nor prevaricate, nor jump at mean motives for generous acts. He had not a single base story about women. It all seemed inhuman.

What creatures we be! I was more than half ashamed of Paterson's faith in me, but when I saw it begin to shrink I fought for it. An easy task, you may say, but it was a hard one, for gradually a change had come over the youth. I am now arrived at a time when the light-heartedness had gone out of him; he had lost his zest for fun, and dubiety sat in the eyes that were once so certain. He was not doubtful of me, not then, but of human nature in general; that whilom noble edifice was tottering. He mixed with boys in the Gardens; ah, mothers, it is hard to say, but how could he retain his innocence when he had mixed with boys? He heard your talk of yourselves, and so, ladies, that part of the edifice went down. I have not the heart to follow him in all his discoveries. Sometimes he went in flame at them, but for the most part he stood looking on, bewildered and numbed, like one moaning inwardly.

He saw all, as one fresh to the world, before he had time to breathe upon the glass. So would your child be, madam, if born with a man's powers, and when disillusioned of all else, he would cling for a moment longer to you, the woman of whom, before he saw you, he had heard so much. How you would strive to cheat him, even as I strove to hide my real self from Paterson, and still you would strive as I strove after you knew the game was up.

The sorrowful eyes of Paterson stripped me bare. There were days when I could not endure looking at him, though surely I have long ceased to be a vain man. He still met us in the Gardens, there seemed nothing else for him to do, but for hours he and I would be together without speaking. It was so upon the last day, one of those innumerable dreary days when David, having sneezed the night before, was kept at home in flannels, and I sat alone with Paterson on the Story-seat. At last I turned to address him. Never had we spoken of what chained our tongues,

and I meant only to say now that we must go, for soon the gates would close, but when I looked at him I saw that he was more mournful than ever before ; he shut his eyes so tightly that a drop of blood fell from them.

"It was all over, Paterson, long ago," I broke out harshly, "why do we linger?"

He beat his hands together miserably, and yet cast me appealing looks that had much affection in them.

"You expected too much of me," I told him, and he bowed his head. "I don't know where you brought your grand ideas of men and women from. I don't want to know," I added hastily.

"But it must have been from a prettier world than this," I said : "are you quite sure that you were wise in leaving it?"

He rose and sat down again. "I wanted to know you," he replied slowly, "I wanted to be like you."

"And now you know me," I said, "do you want to be like me still? I am a curious person to attach oneself to, Paterson ; don't you see that even David often smiles at me when he thinks he is unobserved. I work very hard to retain that little boy's love ; but I shall lose him soon ; even now I am not what I was to him ; in a year or two at longest, Paterson, David will grow out of me."

The poor fellow shot out his hand to me, but "No," said I, "you have found me out. Everybody finds me out except my dog, and that is why the loss of him makes such a difference to me. Shall we go, Paterson?"

He would not come with me, and I left him on the seat ; when I was far away I looked back, and he was still sitting there forlornly.

For long I could not close my ears that night : I lay listening, I knew what for. A scare was on me that made me dislike the dark, and I switched on the light and slept at last. I was roused by a great to-do in the early morning, servants knocking excitedly, and my door opened, and the dear Porthos I had mourned so long tore in. They had heard his bark, but whence he came no one knew. He was in excellent condition, and after he had leaped upon me from all points I flung him on the floor by a trick I know, and lay down beside him, while he put

his protecting arm round me and looked at me with the old adoring eyes.

But we never saw Paterson again. You may think as you choose.

XIX

JOEY



WISE children always choose a mother who was a shocking flirt in her maiden days, and so had several offers before she accepted their fortunate papa. The reason they do this is because every offer refused by their mother means another pantomime to them. You see you can't trust to your father's taking you to the pantomime, but you can trust to every one of the poor frenzied gentlemen for whom that lady has wept a delicious little tear on her lovely little cambric handkerchief. It is pretty (but dreadfully affecting) to see them on Boxing Night gathering together the babies of their old loves. Some knock at but one door and bring a hansom, but others go from street to street in private 'buses, and even wear false noses to conceal the sufferings you inflict upon them as you grow more and more like your sweet cruel mamma.

So I took David to the pantomime, and I hope you follow my reasoning, for I don't. He went with the fairest anticipations, pausing on the threshold to peer through the hole in the little house called "Pay Here," which he thought was Red Riding Hood's residence, and asked politely whether he might see her, but they said she had gone to the wood, and it was quite true, for there she was in the wood gathering a stick for her grandmother's fire. She sang a beautiful song about the Boys and their dashing ways, which flattered David considerably, but she forgot to take away the stick after all. Other parts of the play were not so nice, but David thought it all lovely, he really did.

Yet he left the place in tears. All the way home he sobbed in the darkest corner of the growler, and if I tried to comfort him he struck me.

The clown had done it, that man of whom he expected things so fair. He

had asked in a loud voice of the middling funny gentleman (then in the middle of a song) whether he thought Joey would be long in coming, and when at last Joey did come he screamed out, "How do you do, Joey!" and went into convulsions of mirth.

Joey and his father were shadowing a pork-butcher's shop, pocketing the sausages for which their family has such a fatal weakness, and so when the butcher engaged Joey as his assistant there was soon not a sausage left. However, this did not matter, for there was a box rather like an ice-cream machine, and you put chunks of pork in at one end and turned a handle and they came out as sausages at the other end. Joey quite enjoyed doing this, and you could see that the sausages were excellent by the way he licked his fingers after touching them, but soon there were no more pieces of pork, and just then a dear little Scotch terrier-dog came trotting down the street, so what did Joey do but pop it into the machine and it came out at the other end as sausages.

It was this callous act that turned all David's mirth to woe, and drove us weeping to our growler.

Heaven knows I have no wish to defend this cruel deed, but as Joey told me afterward, it is very difficult to say what they will think funny and what barbarous. I was forced to admit to him that David had perceived only the joyous in the poking of the policeman's legs, and had called out heartily "Do it again!" every time Joey knocked the pantaloons down with one kick and helped him up with another.

"It hurts the poor chap," I was told by Joey, whom I was agreeably surprised to find by no means wanting in the more humane feelings, "and he wouldn't stand it if there wasn't the laugh to encourage him."

He maintained that the dog got that laugh to encourage him also.

However, he had not got it from David, whose mother and father and nurse combined could not comfort him, though they swore that the dog was still alive and kicking, which might all have been very well had not David seen the sausages. It was to inquire whether anything could be

done to atone that in considerable trepidation I sent in my card to the clown, and the result of our talk was that he invited me and David to have tea with him on Thursday next at his lodgings.

"I sha'n't laugh," David said, nobly true to the memory of the little dog, "I sha'n't laugh once," and he closed his jaws very tightly as we drew near the house in Soho where Joey lodged. But he also gripped my hand, like one who knew that it would be an ordeal not to laugh.

The house was rather like the ordinary kind, but there was a convenient sausage-shop exactly opposite (trust Joey for that) and we saw a policeman in the street looking the other way, as they always do look just before you rub them. A woman wearing the same kind of clothes as people in other houses wear, told us to go up to the second floor, and she grinned at David, as if she had heard about him; so up we went, David muttering through his clenched teeth, "I sha'n't laugh," and as soon as we knocked a voice called out, "Here we are again!" at which a shudder passed through David as if he feared that he had set himself an impossible task. In we went, however, and though the voice had certainly come from this room we found nobody there. I looked in bewildered at David, and he quickly put his hand over his mouth.

It was a funny room, of course, but not so funny as you might expect; there were droll things in it, but they did nothing funny, you could see that they were just waiting for Joey. There were padded chairs with friendly looking rents down the middle of them, and a table and a horse-hair sofa, and we sat down very cautiously on the sofa, but nothing happened to us.

The biggest piece of furniture was an enormous wicker trunk, with a very lively colored stocking dangling out at a hole in it, and a notice on the top that Joey was the funniest man on earth. David tried to pull the stocking out of the hole, but it was so long that it never came to an end, and when it measured six times the length of the room he had to cover his mouth again.

"I'm not laughing," he said to me, quite fiercely. He even managed not to laugh (though he did gulp) when we dis-

covered on the mantelpiece a photograph of Joey in ordinary clothes, the garments he wore before he became a clown. You can't think how absurd he looked in them. But David didn't laugh.

Suddenly Joey was standing beside us, it could not have been more sudden though he had come from beneath the table, and he was wearing his pantomime clothes (which he told us afterward were the only clothes he had) and his red and white face was so funny that David made gurgling sounds, which were his laugh trying to force a passage.

I introduced David, who offered his hand stiffly, but Joey, instead of taking it, put out his tongue and wagged it, and this was so droll that David had again to save himself by clapping his hand over his mouth. Joey thought he had toothache, so I explained what it really meant, and then Joey said, "Oh, I shall soon make him laugh," whereupon the following conversation took place between them:

"No, you sha'n't," said David doggedly.

"Yes, I shall."

"No, you sha'n't not."

"Yes, I shall so."

"Sha'n't, sha'n't, sha'n't."

"Shall, shall, shall."

"You shut up."

"You're another."

By this time Joey was in a frightful wax (because he saw he was getting the worst of it), and he boasted that he had David's laugh in his pocket, and David challenged him to produce it, and Joey searched his pockets and brought out the most unexpected articles, including a duck and a bunch of carrots; and you could see by his manner that the simple soul thought these were things which all boys carried loose in their pockets.

I daresay David would have had to laugh in the end, had there not been a half-gnawed sausage in one of the pockets, and the sight of it reminded him so cruelly of the poor dog's fate that he howled, and Joey's heart was touched at last, and he also wept, but he wiped his eyes with the duck.

It was at this touching moment that the pantaloon hobbled in, also dressed as we had seen him last, and carrying, unfortunately, a trayful of sausages, which at once increased the general gloom, for he an-

nounced, in his squeaky voice, that they were the very sausages that had lately been the dog.

Then Joey seemed to have a great idea, and his excitement was so impressive that we stood gazing at him. First, he counted the sausages, and said that they were two short, and he found the missing two up the pantaloon's sleeve. Then he ran out of the room and came back with the sausage-machine; and what do you think he did? He put all the sausages into the end of the machine that they had issued from, and turned the handle backward, and then out came the dog at the other end!

Can you picture the joy of David?

He clasped the dear little terrier in his arms; and then we noticed that there was a sausage adhering to its tail. The pantaloon said we must have put in a sausage too many, but Joey said the machine had not worked quite smoothly and that he feared this sausage was the dog's bark, which distressed David, for he saw how awkward it must be to a dog to have its bark outside, and we were considering what should be done when the dog closed the discussion by swallowing the sausage.

After that, David had the most hilarious hour of his life, entering into the childish pleasures of this family as heartily as if he had been brought up on sausages, and knocking the pantaloon down repeatedly. You must not think that he did this viciously; he did it to please the old gentleman, who begged him to do it, and always shook hands warmly and said "Thank you," when he had done it. They are quite a simple people.

Joey called David and me "Sonny," and asked David, who addressed him as "Mr. Clown," to call him Joey. He also told us that the pantaloon's name was old Joey, and the columbine's Josy, and the harlequin's Joeykin.

We were sorry to hear that old Joey gave him a good deal of trouble. This was because his memory is so bad that he often forgets whether it is your head or your feet you should stand on, and he usually begins the day by standing on the end that happens to get out of bed first. Thus he requires constant watching, and the worst of it is, you dare not draw attention to his mistake, he is so shrink-

ingly sensitive about it. No sooner had Joey told us this than the poor old fellow began to turn upside down and stood on his head; but we pretended not to notice, and talked about the weather until he came to.

Josy and Joeykin, all skirts and spangles, were with us by this time, for they had been invited to tea. They came in dancing, and danced off and on most of the time. Even in the middle of what they were saying they would begin to flutter; it was not so much that they meant to dance as that the slightest thing set them going, such as sitting in a draught; and David found he could blow them about the room like pieces of paper. You could see by the shortness of Josy's dress that she was very young indeed, and at first this made him shy, as he always is when introduced formally to little girls, and he stood sucking his thumb, and so did she, but soon the stiffness wore off and they sat together on the sofa, holding each other's hands.

All this time the harlequin was rotating like a beautiful fish, and David requested him to jump through the wall, at which he is such an adept, and first he said he would, and then he said better not, for the last time he did it the people in the next house had made such a fuss. David had to admit that it must be rather startling to the people on the other side of the wall, but he was sorry.

By this time tea was ready, and Josy, who poured out, remembered to ask if you took milk with just one drop of tea in it, exactly as her mother would have asked. There was nothing to eat, of course, except sausages, but what a number of them there were! hundreds at least, ropes of sausages, and every now and then Joey jumped up and played skipping rope with them. David had been taught not to look greedy, even though he felt greedy, and he was shocked to see the way in which Joey and old Joey and even Josy eyed the sausages they had given him. Soon Josy developed nobler feelings, for she and Joeykin suddenly fell madly in love with each other across the table, but unaffected by this pretty picture, Joey continued to put whole sausages in his mouth at a time, and then rubbed himself a little lower down, while old Joey secreted them about his person;

and when David wasn't looking they both pounced on his sausages, and yet as they gobbled they were constantly running to the top of the stair and screaming to the servant to bring up more sausages.

You could see that Joey (if you caught him with his hand in your plate) was a bit ashamed of himself, and he admitted to us that sausages were a passion with him.

He said he had never once in his life had a sufficient number of sausages. They had maddened him since he was the smallest boy. He told us how, even in those days, his mother had feared for him, though fond of a sausage herself; how he had bought a sausage with his first penny, and hoped to buy one with his last (if they could not be got in any other way), and that he always slept with a string of them beneath his pillow.

While he was giving us these confidences, unfortunately, his eyes came to rest, at first accidentally, then wistfully, then with a horrid gleam in them, on the little dog, which was fooling about on the top of the sausage-machine, and his hands went out toward it convulsively, whereat David, in sudden fear, seized the dog in one arm and gallantly clenched his other fist, and then Joey begged his pardon and burst into tears, each one of which he flung against the wall, where it exploded with a bang.

David refused to pardon him unless he promised on wood never to look in that way at the dog again, but Joey said promises were nothing to him when he was short of sausages, and so his wisest course would be to present the dog to David. Oh, the joy of David when he understood that the little dog he had saved was his very own! I can tell you he was now in a hurry to be off before Joey had time to change his mind.

"All I ask of you," Joey said with a break in his voice, "is to call him after me, and always to give him a sausage, sonny, of a Saturday night."

There was a quiet dignity about Joey at the end, which showed that he might have risen to high distinction but for his fatal passion.

The last we saw of him was from the street. He was waving his tongue at us in his attractive, foolish way, and Josy

was poised on Joeykin's hand like a butterfly that had alighted on a flower. We could not exactly see old Joey, but we saw his feet, and so feared the worst. Of course they are not everything they should be, but one can't help liking them.

XX

PILKINGTON'S



N attaining the age of eight, or thereabout, children fly away from the Gardens, and never come back. When next you meet them they are ladies and gentlemen holding up their umbrellas to hail a hansom.

Where the girls go to I know not, to some private place, I suppose, to put up their hair, but the boys have gone to Pilkington's. He is a man with a cane. You may not go to Pilkington's in knickerbockers made by your mother, make she ever so artfully. They must be real knickerbockers. It is his stern rule. Hence the fearful fascination of Pilkington's.

He may be conceived as one who, baiting his hook with real knickerbockers, fishes all day in the Gardens, which are to him but a pool swarming with small fry.

Abhorred shade! I know not what manner of man thou art in the flesh, sir, but figure thee bearded and blackavised, and of a lean tortuous habit of body, that moves ever with a swish. Every morning, I swear, thou readest avidly the list of male births in thy paper, and then are thy hands rubbed gloatingly the one upon the other. 'Tis fear of thee and thy gown and thy cane, which are part of thee, that makes the fairies to hide by day; wert thou to linger but once among their haunts between the hours of Lock-out and Open Gates there would be left not one single gentle place in all the Gardens. The little people would flit. How much wiser they than the small boys who swim glamoured to thy crafty hook. Thou devastator of the Gardens, I know thee, Pilkington.

I first heard of Pilkington from David, who had it from Oliver Bailey.

This Oliver Bailey was one of the most

dashing figures in the Gardens, and without apparent effort was daily drawing nearer the completion of his seventh year at a time when David seemed unable to get beyond half-past five. I have to speak of him in the past tense, for gone is Oliver from the Gardens (gone to Pilkington's) but he is still a name among us, and some lordly deeds are remembered of him, as that his father shaved twice a day. Oliver himself was all on that scale.

His not ignoble ambition seems always to have been to be wrecked upon an island, indeed I am told that he mentioned it insinuatingly in his prayers, and it was perhaps inevitable that a boy with such an outlook should fascinate David. I am proud, therefore, to be able to state on wood that it was Oliver himself who made the overture.

On first hearing, from some satellite of Oliver's, of Wrecked Islands, as they are called in the Gardens, David said wistfully that he supposed you needed to be very very good before you had any chance of being wrecked, and the remark was conveyed to Oliver, on whom it made an uncomfortable impression. For a time he tried to evade it, but ultimately David was presented to him and invited gloomily to say it again. The upshot was that Oliver advertised the Gardens of his intention to be good until he was eight, and if he had not been wrecked by that time, to be as jolly bad as a boy could be. He was naturally so bad that at the Kindergarten Academy, when the mistress ordered whoever had done the last naughty deed to step forward, Oliver's custom had been to step forward, not necessarily because he had done it, but because he presumed he very likely had.

The friendship of the two dated from this time, and at first I thought Oliver discovered generosity in hasting to David as to an equal; he also walked hand in hand with him, and even reproved him for delinquencies like a loving elder brother. But 'tis a gray world even in the Gardens, for I found that a new arrangement had been made which reduced Oliver to life-size. He had wearied of well-doing, and passed it on, so to speak, to his friend. In other words, on David now devolved the task of being good until he was eight, while Oliver clung to him so closely that

the one could not be wrecked without the other.

When this was made known to me it was already too late to break the spell of Oliver, David was top-heavy with pride in him, and, faith, I began to find myself very much in the cold, for Oliver was frankly bored by me and even David seemed to think it would be convenient if I went and sat with Irene. Am I affecting to laugh? I was really distressed and lonely, and rather bitter; and how humble I became. Sometimes when the dog Joey is unable, by frisking, to induce Porthos to play with him he stands on his hind legs and begs it of him, and I do believe I was sometimes as humble as Joey. Then David would insist on my being suffered to join them, but it was plain that he had no real occasion for me.

It was an unheroic trouble, and I despised myself. For years I had been fighting Mary for David, and had not wholly failed though she was advantaged by the accident of relationship; was I now to be knocked out so easily by a seven year old? I reconsidered my weapons, and I fought Oliver and beat him. Figure to yourself those two boys become as faithful to me as my coat-tails.

With wrecked islands I did it. I began in the most unpretentious way by telling them a story which might last an hour, and favored by many an unexpected wind it lasted eighteen months. It started as the wreck of the simple Swiss family who looked up and saw the butter tree, but soon a glorious inspiration of the night turned it into the wreck of David A— and Oliver Bailey. At first it was what they were to do when they were wrecked, but imperceptibly it became what they had done. I spent much of my time staring reflectively at the titles of the boys' stories in the booksellers' windows, whistling for a breeze, so to say, for I found that the titles were even more helpful than the stories. We wrecked everybody of note, including all Homer's most taking characters and the hero of *Paradise Lost*. But we suffered them not to land. We stripped them of what we wanted and left them to wander the high seas naked of adventure. And all this was merely the beginning.

By this time I had been cast upon the island. It was not my own proposal, but David knew my wishes, and he made it all right for me with Oliver. They found me among the breakers with a large dog, which had kept me afloat throughout that terrible night. I was the sole survivor of the ill-fated *Anna Pink*. So exhausted was I that they had to carry me to their hut, and great was my gratitude when on opening my eyes, I found myself in that romantic edifice instead of in Davy Jones's locker. As we walked in the Gardens I told them of the hut they had built; and they were inflated but not surprised. On the other hand, they looked for surprise from me.

"Did we tell you about the turtle we turned on its back?" asked Oliver, reverting to deeds of theirs of which I had previously told them.

"You did."

"Who turned it?" demanded David, not as one who needed information but after the manner of a schoolmaster.

"It was turned," I said, "by David A—, the younger of the two youths."

"Who made the monkeys fling coconuts at him?" asked the older of the two youths.

"Oliver Bailey," I replied.

"Was it Oliver," asked David sharply, "that found the cocoa-nut-tree first?"

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was first observed by David, who immediately climbed it, remarking, 'This is certainly the *cocos-nucifera*, for, see, dear Oliver, the slender columns supporting the crown of leaves which fall with a grace that no art can imitate.'"

"That's what I said," remarked David with a wave of his hand.

"I said things like that too," Oliver insisted.

"No, you didn't then," said David.

"Yes, I did so."

"No, you didn't so."

"Shut up."

"Well, then, let's hear one you said."

Oliver looked appealingly at me. "The following," I announced, "is one that Oliver said: 'Truly, dear comrade, though the perils of these happenings are great, and our privations calculated to break the stoutest heart, yet to be rewarded by such fair sights I would en-

ture still greater trials and still rejoice even as the bird on yonder bough.'"

"That's one I said!" crowed Oliver.

"I shot the bird," said David instantly.

"What bird?"

"The yonder bird."

"No, you didn't."

"Did I not shoot the bird?"

"It was David who shot the bird," I said, "but it was Oliver who saw by its multi-colored plumage that it was one of the *Psittacidae*, an excellent substitute for partridge."

"You didn't see that," said Oliver, rather swollen.

"Yes, I did."

"What did you see?"

"I saw that."

"What?"

"You shut up."

"David shot it," I summed up, "and Oliver knew its name, but I ate it. Do you remember how hungry I was?"

"Rather!" said David.

"I cooked it," said Oliver.

"It was served up on toast," I reminded them.

"I toasted it," said David.

"Toast from the bread-fruit-tree," I said, "which (as you both remarked simultaneously) bears two and sometimes three crops in the year, and also affords a serviceable gum for the pitching of canoes."

"I pitched mine best," said Oliver.

"I pitched mine farthest," said David.

"And when I had finished my repast," said I, "you amazed me by handing me a cigar from the tobacco-plant."

"I handed it," said Oliver.

"I snicked off the end," said David.

"And then," said I, "you gave me a light."

"Which of us?" they cried together.

"Both of you," I said. "Never shall I forget my amazement when I saw you get that light by rubbing two sticks together."

At this they waggled their heads. "You couldn't have done it!" said David.

"No, David," I admitted, "I can't do it, but of course I know that all wrecked boys do it quite easily. Show me how you did it."

But after consulting apart they agreed

not to show me. I was not shown everything.

David was now firmly convinced that he had once been wrecked on an island, while Oliver passed his days in dubiety. They used to argue it out together and among their friends. As I unfolded the story Oliver listened with an open knife in his hand, and David who was not allowed to have a knife wore a pirate-string round his waist. Irene in her usual interfering way objected to this bauble and dropped disparaging remarks about wrecked islands which were little to her credit. I was for defying her, but David, who had the knack of women, knew a better way; he craftily proposed that we "should let Irene in," in short, should wreck her, and though I objected, she proved a great success and recognized the *yucca filamentosa* by its long narrow leaves the very day she joined us. Thereafter we had no more scoffing from Irene, who listened to the story as hotly as anybody.

This encouraged us in time to let in David's father and mother, though they never knew it unless he told them, as I have no doubt he did. They were admitted primarily to gratify David, who was very soft-hearted and knew that while he was on the island they must be missing him very much at home. So we let them in, and there was no part of the story he liked better than that which told of the joyous meeting. We were in need of another woman at any rate, someone more romantic looking than Irene, and Mary, I can assure her now, had a busy time of it. She was constantly being carried off by cannibals, and David became quite an adept at plucking her from the very pot itself and springing from cliff to cliff with his lovely burden in his arms. There was seldom a Saturday in which David did not kill his man.

I shall now provide the proof that David believed it all to be true as true. It was told me by Oliver, who had it from our hero himself. I had described to them how the savages tattooed David's father, and Oliver informed me that one night shortly afterward David was discovered softly lifting the blankets off his father's legs to have a look at the birds and reptiles etched thereon.

Thus many months passed with no word

of Pilkington, and you may be asking where he was all this time. Ah, my friends, he was very busy fishing, though I was as yet unaware of his existence. Most suddenly I heard the whirr of his hated reel, as he struck a fish. I remember that grim day with painful vividness, it was a wet day, indeed I think it has rained for me more or less ever since. As soon as they joined me I saw from the manner of the two boys that they had something to communicate. Oliver nudged David and retired a few paces, whereupon David said to me solemnly,

"Oliver is going to Pilkington's."

I immediately perceived that it was some school, but so little did I understand the import of David's remark that I called out jocularly, "I hope he won't swish you, Oliver."

Evidently I had pained both of them, for they exchanged glances and retired for consultation behind a tree, whence David returned to say with emphasis,

"He has two jackets and two waistcoats and two knickerbockers, *all real ones.*"

"Well done, Oliver!" said I, but it was the wrong thing again, and once more they disappeared behind the tree. Evidently they decided that the time for plain speaking was come, for now David announced bluntly:

"He wants you not to call him Oliver any longer."

"What shall I call him?"

"Bailey."

"But why?"

"He's going to Pilkington's. And he can't play with us any more after next Saturday."

"Why not?"

"He's going to Pilkington's."

So now I knew the law about the thing, and we moved on together, Oliver stretching himself consciously, and methought that even David walked with a sedate air.

"David," said I, with a sinking, "are you going to Pilkington's?"

"When I am eight," he replied.

"And sha'n't I call you David then, and won't you play with me in the Gardens any more?"

He looked at Bailey, and Bailey signalled to him to be firm.

"Oh, no," said David cheerily.

Thus sharply did I learn how much longer I was to have of him. Strange that a little boy can give so much pain. I dropped his hand and walked on in silence, and presently I did my most churlish to hurt him by ending the story abruptly in a very cruel way. "Ten years have elapsed," said I, "since I last spoke, and our two heroes, now gay young men, are revisiting the wrecked island of their childhood. 'Did we wreck ourselves,' said one, 'or was there someone to help us?' And the other, who was the younger, replied, 'I think there was someone to help us, a man with a dog. I think he used to tell me stories in the Kensington Gardens, but I forget all about him; I don't remember even his name.'"

This tame ending bored Bailey, and he drifted away from us, but David still walked by my side, and he was grown so quiet that I knew a storm was brewing. Suddenly he flashed lightning on me. "It's not true," he cried, "it's a lie!" He gripped my hand. "I sha'n't never forget you, father."

Strange that a little boy can give so much pleasure.

Yet I could go on. "You will forget, David, but there was once a boy who would have remembered."

"Timothy?" said he at once. He thinks Timothy was a real boy, and is very jealous of him. He turned his back to me, and stood alone and wept passionately, while I waited for him. You may be sure I begged his pardon, and made it all right with him, and had him laughing and happy again before I let him go. But nevertheless what I said was true. David is not my boy, and he will forget. But Timothy would have remembered.

XXI

BARBARA



ANOTHER shock was waiting for me farther down the story.

For we had resumed our adventures, though we seldom saw Bailey now. At long intervals we met him on our way to or from the Gardens, and, if there was none from Pilkington's to mark him, me-

thought he looked at us somewhat longingly, as if beneath his real knickerbockers a morsel of the egg-shell still adhered. Otherwise he gave David a not unfriendly kick in passing, and called him "youngster." That was about all.

When Oliver disappeared from the life of the Gardens we had lofted him out of the story, and did very well without him, extending our operations to the mainland, where they were on so vast a scale that we were rapidly depopulating the earth. And then said David one day,

"Shall we let Barbara in?"

We had occasionally considered the giving of Bailey's place to some other child of the Gardens, divers of David's year having sought election, even with bribes; but Barbara was new to me.

"Who is she?" I asked.

"She's my sister."

You may imagine how I gaped.

"She hasn't come yet," David said lightly, "but she's coming."

I was shocked, not perhaps so much shocked as disillusioned, for though I had always suspicioned Mary A—as one who harbored the craziest ambitions when she looked most humble, of such presumption as this I had never thought her capable.

I wandered across the Broad Walk to have a look at Irene, and she was wearing an unmistakable air. It set me reflecting about Mary's husband and his manner the last time we met, for though I have had no opportunity to say so, we still meet now and again, and he has even dined with me at the club. On these occasions the subject of Timothy is barred, and if by any unfortunate accident Mary's name is mentioned, we immediately look opposite ways and a silence follows, in which I feel sure he is smiling, and wonder what the deuce he is smiling at. I remembered now that I had last seen him when I was dining with him at his club (for he is become member of a club of painter fellows, and Mary is so proud of this that she has had it printed on his card), when undoubtedly he had looked preoccupied. It had been the look, I saw now, of one who shared a guilty secret.

As all was thus suddenly revealed to me I laughed unpleasantly at myself, for, on my soul, I had been thinking well of

Mary of late. Always foolishly inflated about David, she had been grudging him even to me during these last weeks, and I had forgiven her, putting it down to a mother's love. I knew from the poor boy of unwonted treats she had been giving him; I had seen her embrace him furtively in a public place, her every act, in so far as they were known to me, had been a challenge to whoever dared assert that she wanted anyone but David. How could I, not being a woman, have guessed that she was really saying good-by to him?

Reader, picture to yourself that simple little boy playing about the house at this time, on the understanding that everything was going on as usual. Have not his toys acquired a new pathos, especially the engine she bought him yesterday?

Did you look him in the face, Mary, as you gave him that engine? I envy you not your feelings, ma'am, when with loving arms he wrapped you round for it. That childish confidence of his to me, in which unwittingly he betrayed you, indicates that at last you have been preparing him for the great change, and I suppose you are capable of replying to me that David is still happy, and even interested. But does he know from you what it really means to him? Rather, I do believe, you are one who would not scruple to give him to understand that B (which you may yet find stands for Benjamin) is primarily a gift for him. In your heart, ma'am, what do you think of this tricking of a little boy?

Suppose David had known what was to happen before he came to you, are you sure he would have come? Undoubtedly there is an unwritten compact in such matters between a mother and her first-born, and I desire to point out to you that he never breaks it. Again, what will the other boys say when they know? You are outside the criticism of the Gardens, but David is not. Faith, madam, I believe you would have been kinder to wait and let him run the gauntlet at Pilkington's.

You think your husband is a great man now because they are beginning to talk of his foregrounds and middle distances in the newspaper columns that nobody reads. I know you have bought him a velvet coat, and that he has taken a large, airy and commodious studio in Mews Lane,

where you are to be found in a soft material on first and third Wednesdays. Times are changing, but shall I tell you a story here, just to let you see that I am acquainted with it?

Three years ago a certain gallery accepted from a certain artist a picture which he and his wife knew to be monstrous fine. But no one spoke of the picture, no one wrote of it, and no one made an offer for it. Crushed was the artist, sorry for the denseness of connoisseurs was his wife, till the work was bought by a dealer for an anonymous client, and then elated were they both, and relieved also to discover that I was not the buyer. He came to me at once to make sure of this, and remained to walk the floor gloriously as he told me what recognition means to gentlemen of the artistic callings. O, the happy boy!

But months afterward, rummaging at his home in a closet that is usually kept locked, he discovered the picture, there hidden away. His wife backed into a corner and made trembling confession. How could she submit to see her dear's masterpiece ignored by the idiot public, and her dear himself plunged into gloom thereby? She knew as well as he (for had they not been married for years?) how the artistic instinct hungers for recognition, and so with her savings she bought the great work anonymously and stored it away in the closet. At first, I believe, the man raved furiously, but by and by he was on his knees at the feet of this little darling. You know who she was, Mary, but, bless me, I seem to be praising you, and that was not the enterprise on which I set out. What I intended to convey was that though you can now venture on small extravagances, you seem to be going too fast. Look at it how one may, this Barbara idea is undoubtedly a bad business.

How to be even with her? I cast about for a means, and on my lucky day I did conceive my final triumph over Mary, at which I have scarcely as yet dared to hint, lest by discovering it I should spoil my plot. For there has been a plot all the time.

For long I had known that Mary contemplated the writing of a book, my informant being David, who, because I have

published a little volume on Military tactics, and am preparing a larger one on the same subject (which I shall never finish), likes to watch my methods of composition, how I dip, and so on, his desire being to help her. He may have done this on his own initiative, but it is also quite possible that in her desperation she urged him to it; he certainly implied that she had taken to book-writing because it must be easy if I could do it. She also informed him (very inconsiderately), that I did not print my books myself, and this lowered me in the eyes of David, for it was for the printing he had admired me and boasted of me in the Gardens.

"I suppose you didn't make the boxes neither, nor yet the labels," he said to me in the voice of one shorn of belief in everything.

I should say here that my literary labors are abstruse, the token whereof is many rows of boxes nailed against my walls, each labelled with a letter of the alphabet. When I take a note in *A*, I drop it into the *A* box, and so on, much to the satisfaction of David, who likes to drop them in for me. I had now to admit that Wheeler & Gibb made the boxes.

"But I made the labels myself, David."

"They are not so well made as the boxes," he replied.

Thus I had reason to wish ill to Mary's work of imagination, as I presumed it to be, and I said to him with easy brutality, "Tell her about the boxes, David, and that no one can begin a book until they are all full. That will frighten her."

Soon thereafter he announced to me that she had got a box.

"One box!" I said with a sneer.

"She made it herself," retorted David hotly.

I got little real information from him about the work, partly because David loses his footing when he descends to the practical, and perhaps still more because he found me unsympathetic. But when he blurted out the title, "The Little White Bird," I was like one who had read the book to its last page. I knew at once that the white bird was the little daughter Mary would fain have had. Somehow I had always known that she would like to have a little daughter, she was that kind of

woman, and so long as she had the modesty to see that she could not have one, I sympathized with her deeply, whatever I may have said about her book to David.

In those days Mary had the loveliest ideas for her sad little book, and they came to her mostly in the morning when she was only three-parts awake, but as she stepped out of bed they all flew away like startled birds. I gathered from David that this depressed her exceedingly.

Oh, Mary, your thoughts are much too pretty and holy to show themselves to anyone but yourself. The shy things are hiding within you. If they could come into the open they would not be a book, they would be little Barbara.

But that was not the message I sent her. "She will never be able to write it," I explained to David. "She has not the ability. Tell her I said that."

I remembered now that for many months I had heard nothing of her ambitious project, so I questioned David and discovered that it was abandoned. He could not say why, nor was it necessary that he should, the trivial little reason was at once so plain to me. From that moment all my sympathy with Mary was spilled, and I searched for some means of exulting over her until I found it. It was this. I decided, unknown even to David, to write the book "The Little White Bird," of which she had proved herself incapable, and then when, in the fulness of time, she held her baby on high, implying that she had done a big thing, I was to hold up the book. I venture to think that such a devilish revenge was never before planned and carried out.

Yes, carried out, for this is the book, rapidly approaching completion. She and I are running a neck-and-neck race.

I have also once more brought the story of David's adventures to an abrupt end. "And it really is the end this time, David," I said severely. (I always say that.)

It ended on the coast of Patagonia, whither we had gone to shoot the great Sloth, known to be the largest of animals, though we found his size to have been under-estimated. David, his father and I had flung our limbs upon the beach and were having a last pipe before turning in, while Mary, attired in barbaric splendor, sang and danced before us. It was a

lovely evening, and we lolled manlike, gazing, well-content, at the pretty creature.

The night was absolutely still save for the roaring of the Sloths in the distance.

By and by Irene came to the entrance of our cave, where by the light of her torch we could see her exploring a shark that had been harpooned by David earlier in the day.

Everything conduced to repose, and a feeling of gentle peace crept over us, from which we were roused by a shrill cry. It was uttered by Irene, who came speeding to us, bearing certain articles, a watch, a pair of boots, a newspaper, which she had discovered in the interior of the shark. What was our surprise to find in the newspaper intelligence of the utmost importance to all of us. It was nothing less than this, the birth of a new baby in London to Mary.

How strange a method had Solomon chosen of sending us the news.

The bald announcement at once plunged us into a fever of excitement, and next morning we set sail for England. Soon we came within sight of the white cliffs of Albion. Mary could not sit down for a moment, so hot was she to see her child. She paced the deck in uncontrollable agitation.

"So did I!" cried David, when I had reached this point in the story.

On arriving at the docks we immediately hailed a cab.

"Never, David," I said, "shall I forget your mother's excitement. She kept putting her head out of the window and calling to the cabby to go quicker, quicker. How he lashed his horse! At last he drew up at your house, and then your mother, springing out, flew up the steps and beat with her hands upon the door."

David was quite carried away by the reality of it. "Father has the key!" he screamed.

"He opened the door," I said grandly, "and your mother rushed in, and next moment her Benjamin was in her arms."

There was a pause.

"Barbara," corrected David.

"Benjamin," said I doggedly.

"Is that a girl's name?"

"No, it's a boy's name."

"But mother wants a girl," he said, very much shaken.

"Just like her presumption," I replied testily. "It is to be a boy, David, and you can tell her I said so."

He was in a deplorable but most unselfish state of mind. A boy would have suited him quite well, but he put self aside altogether and was pertinaciously solicitous that Mary should be given her fancy.

"Barbara," he repeatedly implored me.

"Benjamin," I replied firmly.

For long I was obdurate, but the time was summer, and at last I agreed to play him for it, a two-innings match. If he won it was to be a girl, and if I won it was to be a boy.

XXII

THE CRICKET MATCH



THINK there has not been so much on a cricket match since the day when Sir Horace Mann walked about Broad Ha'penny agitatedly cutting down the daisies with his stick. And, be it remembered, the heroes of Hambledon played for money and renown only, while David was champion of a lady. A lady! May we not prettily say of two ladies? There were no spectators of our contest except now and again some loiterer in the Gardens who little thought what was the stake for which we played, but cannot we conceive Barbara standing at the ropes and agitatedly cutting down the daisies every time David missed the ball? I tell you, this was the historic match of the Gardens.

David wanted to play on a pitch near the Round Pond with which he is familiar, but this would have placed me at a disadvantage, so I insisted on unaccustomed ground, and we finally pitched stumps in the Figs. We could not exactly pitch stumps, for they are forbidden in the Gardens, but there are trees here and there which have chalk-marks on them throughout the summer, and when you take up your position with a bat near one of these you have really pitched stumps. The tree we selected is a ragged yew which consists of a broken trunk and one branch, and I

viewed the ground with secret satisfaction, for it falls slightly at about four yards' distance from the tree, and this exactly suits my style of bowling.

I won the toss, and after examining the wicket decided to take first knock. As a rule when we play the wit at first flows free, but on this occasion I strode to the crease in an almost eerie silence. David had taken off his blouse and rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and his teeth were set, so I knew he would begin by sending me down some fast ones.

His delivery is underhand and not inelegant, but he sometimes tries a round-arm ball, which I have seen double up the fielder at square leg. He has not a good length, but he varies his action bewilderingly, and has one especially teasing ball which falls from the branches just as you have stepped out of your ground to look for it. It was not, however, with his teaser that he bowled me that day. I had notched a three and two singles, when he sent me down a medium to fast which got me in two minds and I played back to it too late. Now, I am seldom out on a really grassy wicket for such a meagre score, and as David and I changed places without a word, there was a cheery look on his face that I found very galling. He ran in to my second ball and cut it neatly to the on for a single, and off my fifth and sixth he had two pretty drives for three, both behind the wicket. This, however, as I hoped, proved the undoing of him, for he now hit out confidently at everything, and with his score at nine I beat him with my shooter.

The look was now on my face.

I opened my second innings by treating him with uncommon respect, for I knew that his little arm soon tired if he was unsuccessful, and then when he sent me loose ones I banged him to the railings. What cared I though David's lips were twitching.

When he ultimately got past my defence, with a jumpy one which broke awkwardly from the off, I had fetched twenty-three so that he needed twenty to win, a longer hand than he had ever yet made. As I gave him the bat he looked brave, but something wet fell on my hand, and then a sudden fear seized me lest David should not win.

At the very outset, however, he seemed to master the bowling, and soon fetched about ten runs in a classic manner. Then I tossed him a Yorker which he missed and it went off at a tangent as soon as it had reached the tree. "Not out," I cried hastily, for the face he turned to me was terrible.

Soon thereafter another incident happened, which I shall always recall with pleasure. He had caught the ball too high on the bat, and I just missed the catch. "Dash it all!" said I irritably, and was about to resume bowling, when I noticed that he was unhappy. He hesitated, took up his position at the wicket, and then came to me manfully. "I am a cad," he said in distress, "for when the ball was in the air I prayed." He had prayed that I should miss the catch, and as I think I have already told you, it is considered unfair in the Gardens to pray for victory.

My splendid David! He has the faults of other little boys, but he has a noble sense of fairness. "We shall call it a no-ball, David," I said gravely.

I suppose the suspense of the reader is now painful, and therefore I shall say at once that David won the match with two lovely fours, the one over my head and the other to leg all along the ground. When I came back from fielding this last ball I found him embracing his bat, and to my sour congratulations he could at first reply only with hysterical sounds. But soon he was pelting home to his mother with the glorious news.

And that is how we let Barbara in.

XXIII

THE DEDICATION



T was only yesterday afternoon, dear reader, exactly three weeks after the birth of Barbara, that I finished the book, and even then it was not quite finished, for there remained the dedication, at which I set to elatedly. I think I have never enjoyed myself more; indeed, it is my opinion that I wrote the book as an excuse for writing the dedication.

"Madam" (I wrote wittily), "I have no desire to exult over you, yet I should show a lamentable obtuseness to the irony of things were I not to dedicate this little work to you. For its inception was yours, and in your more ambitious days you thought to write the tale of the little white bird yourself. Why you so early deserted the nest is not for me to inquire. It now appears that you were otherwise occupied. In fine, madam, you chose the lower road, and contented yourself with obtaining the Bird. May I point out, by presenting you with this dedication, that in the meantime I am become the parent of the Book? To you the shadow, to me the substance. Trusting that you will accept my little offering in a Christian spirit, I am, dear madam," etc.

It was heady work, for the saucy words showed their design plainly through the varnish, and I was re-reading in an ecstasy, when, without warning, the door burst open and a little boy entered, dragging in a faltering lady.

"Father," said David, "this is mother."

Having thus briefly introduced us, he turned his attention to the electric light, and switched it on and off so rapidly that, as was very fitting, Mary and I may be said to have met for the first time to the accompaniment of flashes of lightning. I think she was arrayed in little blue feathers, but if such a costume is not seemly, I swear there were, at least, little blue feathers in her too coquettish cap, and that she was carrying a muff to match. No part of a woman is more dangerous than her muff, and as muffs are not worn in early autumn, even by invalids, I saw in a twink that she had put on all her pretty things to wheedle me. I am also of opinion that she remembered she had worn blue in the days when I watched her from the club-window. Undoubtedly Mary is an engaging little creature, though not my style. She was paler than is her wont, and had the touching look of one whom it would be easy to break. I daresay this was a trick. Her skirts made music in my room, but perhaps this was only because no lady had ever rustled in it before. It was disquieting to me to reflect that despite her obvious uneasiness, she was a very artful woman.

With the quickness of David at the

switch, I slipped a blotting-pad over the dedication, and then, "Pray be seated," I said coldly, but she remained standing, all in a twitter and very much afraid of me, and I knew that her hands were pressed together within the muff. Had there been any dignified means of escape, I think we would both have taken it.

"I should not have come," she said nervously, and then seemed to wait for some response, so I bowed.

"I was terrified to come, indeed I was," she assured me with obvious sincerity.

"But I have come," she finished rather baldly.

"It is an epitome, ma'am," said I, seeing my chance, "of your whole life," and with that I put her into my elbow-chair.

She began to talk of my adventures with David in the Gardens, and of some little things I have not mentioned here, that I may have done for her when I was in a wayward mood, and her voice was as soft as her muff. She had also an affecting way of pronouncing all her *r's* as *w's*, just as the fairies do. "And so," she said, "as you would not come to me to be thanked, I have come to you to thank you." Whereupon she thanked me most abominably. She also slid one of her hands out of the muff, and though she was smiling her eyes were wet.

"Pooh, ma'am," says I in desperation, but I did not take her hand.

"I am not very strong yet," she said with low cunning. She said this to make me take her hand, so I took it, and perhaps I patted it a little. Then I walked brusquely to the window. The truth is, I was begun to think uncomfortably of the dedication.

I went to the window because, undoubtedly, it would be easier to address her severely from behind, and I wanted to say something that would sting her.

"When you have quite done, ma'am," I said, after a long pause, "perhaps you will allow me to say a word."

I could see the back of her head only, but I knew, from David's face, that she had given him a quick look which did not imply that she was stung. Indeed I felt now, as I had felt before, that though she was agitated and in some fear of me, she was also enjoying herself considerably.

In such circumstances I might as well have tried to sting a sand-bank, so I said, rather off my watch, "If I have done all this for you, why did I do it?"

She made no answer in words, but seemed to grow taller in the chair, so that I could see her shoulders, and I knew from this that she was now holding herself conceitedly and trying to look modest. "Not a bit of it, ma'am," said I sharply, "that was not the reason at all."

I was pleased to see her whisk round, rather indignant at last.

"I never said it was," she retorted with spirit, "I never thought for a moment that it was." She added, a trifle too late in the story, "Besides, I don't know what you are talking of."

I think I must have smiled here, for she turned from me quickly, and became quite little in the chair again.

"David," said I mercilessly, "did you ever see your mother blush?"

"What is blush?"

"She goes a beautiful pink color."

David, who had by this time broken my connection with the head office, crossed to his mother expectantly.

"I don't, David," she cried.

"I think," said I, "she will do it now," and with the instinct of a gentleman I looked away. Thus I cannot tell what happened, but presently David exclaimed admiringly, "Oh, mother, do it again!"

As she would not, he stood on the fender to see in the mantle-glass whether he could do it himself, and then Mary turned a most candid face on me, in which was maternity rather than reproach. Perhaps no look given by woman to man affects him quite so much. "You see," she said radiantly and with a gesture that disclosed herself to me, "I can forgive even that. You long ago earned the right to hurt me if you want to."

It weaned me of all further desire to rail at Mary, and I felt an uncommon drawing to her.

"And if I did think *that* for a little while——," she went on, with an unsteady smile.

"Think what?" I asked, but without the necessary snap.

"What we were talking of," she replied wincing, but forgiving me again. "If I once thought that, it was pretty to

me while it lasted and it lasted but a little time. I have long been sure that your kindness to me was due to some other reason."

"Ma'am," said I very honestly, "I know not what was the reason. My concern for you was in the beginning a very fragile and even a selfish thing, yet not altogether selfish, for I think that what first stirred it was the joyous sway of the little nursery-governess as she walked down Pall Mall to meet her lover. It seemed such a mighty fine thing to you to be loved that I thought you had better continue to be loved for a little longer. And perhaps having helped you once by dropping a letter I was charmed by the ease with which you could be helped, for you must know that I am one who has chosen the easy way for more than twenty years."

She shook her head and smiled. "On my soul," I assured her, "I can think of no other reason."

"A kind heart," said she.

"More likely a whim," said I.

"Or another woman," said she.

I was very much taken aback.

"More than twenty years ago," she said, with a soft huskiness in her voice, and a tremor and a sweetness, as if she did not know that in twenty years all love-stories are grown mouldy.

On my honor as a soldier this explanation of my early solicitude for Mary was one that had never struck me, but the more I pondered it now—. I raised her hand and touched it with my lips, as we whimsical old fellows do when some gracious girl makes us to hear the key in the lock of long ago. "Why, ma'am," I said, "it is a pretty notion, and there may be something in it. Let us leave it at that."

But there was still that accursed dedication, lying, you remember, beneath the blotting-pad. I had no longer any desire to crush her with it. I wished that she had succeeded in writing the book on which her longings had been so set.

"If only you had been less ambitious," I said, much troubled that she should be disappointed in her heart's desire.

"I wanted all the dear delicious things," she admitted contritely.

"It was unreasonable," I said eagerly,

appealing to her intellect. "Especially this last thing."

"Yes," she agreed frankly, "I know." And then to my amazement she added triumphantly, "But I got it."

I suppose my look admonished her, for she continued apologetically but still as if she really thought hers had been a romantic career, "I know I have not deserved it, but I got it."

"Oh, ma'am," I cried reproachfully, "reflect. You have not got the great thing." I saw her counting the great things in her mind, her wondrous husband and his obscure success, David, Barbara, and the other trifling contents of her jewel-box.

"I think I have," said she.

"Come madam," I cried a little nettled, "you know that there is lacking the one thing you craved for most of all."

Will you believe me that I had to tell her what it was? And when I had told her she exclaimed with extraordinary callousness, "The book? I had forgotten all about the book!" And then after reflection she added, "Pooh." Had she not added Pooh I might have spared her, but as it was I raised the blotting-pad rather haughtily and presented her with the sheet beneath it.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Ma'am," said I, swelling, "it is a Dedication," and I walked majestically to the window.

There is no doubt that presently I heard an unexpected sound. Yet if indeed it had been a laugh she clipped it short, for in almost the same moment she was looking large-eyed at me and tapping my sleeve impulsively with her fingers, just as David does when he suddenly likes you.

"How characteristic of you," she said at the window.

"Characteristic," I echoed uneasily. "Ha!"

"And how kind."

"Did you say kind, ma'am?"

"But it is I who have the substance and you who have the shadow, as you know very well," said she.

Yes, I had always known that this was the one flaw in my dedication, but how could I have expected her to have the wit to see it? I was very depressed.

"And there is another mistake," said she.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but that is the only one."

"It was never of my little white bird I wanted to write," she said.

I looked politely incredulous, and then indeed she overwhelmed me. "It was of your little white bird," she said, "it was of a little boy whose name was Timothy."

She had a very pretty way of saying Timothy, so David and I went into another room to leave her alone with the manuscript of this poor little book, and when we returned she had the greatest surprise of the day for me. She was both laughing and crying, which was no surprise, for all of us would laugh and cry over a book about such an interesting subject as ourselves, but said she, "How wrong you are in thinking this book is about me and mine, it is really all about Timothy."

At first I deemed this to be uncommon nonsense, but as I considered I saw that she was probably right again, and I gazed crestfallen at this very clever woman.

"And so," said she, clapping her hands after the manner of David when he makes a great discovery, "it proves to be my book after all."

"With all your pretty thoughts left out," I answered, properly humbled.

She spoke in a lower voice as if David must not hear. "I had only one pretty thought for the book," she said, "I was to give it a happy ending." She said this so timidly that I was about to melt to her when she added with extraordinary boldness, "The little white bird was to bear an olive-leaf in its mouth. Peter Pan, who is really Timothy, was not to find the window closed."

For a long time she talked to me earnestly of a grand scheme on which she had set her heart, and ever and anon she tapped on me as if to get admittance for her ideas. I listened respectfully, smiling at this young thing for carrying it so motherly to me, and in the end I had to remind her that I was forty-seven years of age.

"It is quite young for a man," she said brazenly.

"My father," said I, "was not forty-seven when he died, and I remember thinking him an old man."

"But you don't think so now, do you?" she persisted, "you feel young occasionally, don't you? Sometimes when you are playing with David in the Gardens your youth comes swinging back, does it not?"

"Mary A—," I cried, grown afraid of the woman, "I forbid you to make any more discoveries to-day."

But still she hugged her scheme, which I doubt not was what had brought her to my rooms. "They are very dear women," said she coaxingly.

"I am sure," I said, "they must be dear women if they are friends of yours."

"They are not exactly young," she faltered, "and perhaps they are not very pretty——"

But she had been reading so recently about the darling of my youth that she halted abashed at last, feeling, I apprehend, a stop in her mind against proposing this thing to me, who, in those presumptuous days, had thought to be content with nothing less than the loveliest lady in all the land.

My thoughts had reverted also, and for the last time my eyes saw the little hut through the pinewood haze. I met Mary there, and we came back to the present together.

I have already told you, reader, that this conversation took place no longer ago than yesterday.

"Very well, ma'am," I said, trying to put a brave face on it, "I will come to your tea-parties, and we shall see what we shall see."

It was really all she had asked for, but now that she had got what she wanted of me the foolish soul's eyes became wet, she knew so well that the youthful romances are the best.

It was now my turn to comfort her. "In twenty years," I said, smiling at her tears, "a man grows humble, Mary. I have stored within me a great fund of affection, with nobody to give it to, and I swear to you, on the word of a soldier, that if there is one of those ladies who can be got to care for me I shall be very proud." Despite her semblance of delight I knew that she was wondering at me, and I wondered at myself, but it was true.

THE END.

THE POINT OF VIEW

MERCUTIO wreaked all his dislike upon a man that fought "by the book." I have a mortal grudge against one that talks by the book. Let a man write himself into syntactical tangles that would befuddle a German philosopher; let him be pompous as Sir William Temple; let him be purposely archaic as Spenser or as full of coinages as Shakespeare, as parenthetical as Browning or as antithetical as Swinburne; let him follow any whim or scholasticism to the death, so long as he commits bookishness only on paper. But heaven preserve me from frequent encounter with the fatal bore that talks bookishly. I am not patient with the unco'learned who interlard their speech with those crackling "by which's" and "to whom's" rather than seek the direct colloquial forthright that gives them an honest, stout preposition to end a sentence with. Now, the torment of bookishness in actual talk is bad enough; but you can always escape by running, or at least call the police. What refuge is there, though, from the bookish talk of the characters in fiction? When an author is before the curtain in *propria persona*, one is not offended necessarily by magniloquence or over-nicety of construction, but when he steps back and pulls the strings that work his puppets' jaws, then surely, surely he must talk like talk, and not like composition.

Doctor Johnson, when he conversed, was as straightforward as a boxer's "short-arm jab," and the world thanks Boswell for the presentation of the sage impersonating himself. On the other hand, one may also like the old lexicographer when he is writing his most Johnsonese (though you might sometimes wonder if he were not trying on the sly to encourage the use of his dictionary). I love him when he moves in his *largo pomposo* mood. Every "not only—but also," each "he was not ———, nor was he," the constant appearance of his pet word "without," and all his latinity, I like; but when his people begin to talk I shudder; for they simply open their mouths while he grinds out the

same old syntactics, and their speech is only Johnsonese, with quotation marks at either end. Thus Pekuah, when Rasselas asks about the Arab and his seraglio-women:

"He was not exalted in his own esteem by the smiles of a woman who saw no other man, nor was much obliged by that regard of which he could never know the sincerity, and which he might often perceive to be exerted, not so much to delight him as to pain a rival."

Of course the poor old Doctor wrote the book in seven evenings to pay an undertaker's bill, and he never saw the proofs of it, but it is to be doubted if he would have made any change at his leisure, except to load his sentences a little fuller. Scott, too, was writing against time and money, much of his days, but that again does not explain all of his sins. I think I got my first dread of stilted conversations from this paragraph in "Old Mortality" (Chapter XXXVII.):

"And yet," she said, "such is the waywardness with which my heart reverts to former times, that I cannot" (she burst into tears) "suppress a degree of ominous reluctance at fulfilling my engagement upon such a brief summons."

Read years and years ago, the wax-worksiness of that paragraph sticks to a memory whence all the rest of the story has faded. When Scott is dealing with churls who talk dialect his conversations have much human naturalness, though a whit too much spiced with his lore; but when his great people talk—plausibility vanishes!

That little interpolation: "she burst into tears," is largely to blame for the wreck of its context, and similar gimlet-holes have scuttled other ambitious emotional passages. A large part of the unnaturalness of unnatural book-talk comes from just this parenthetical mistake; often the clause is thrown in by the speaker himself in a manner the reader resents as impossible colloquially, however elegant grammatically. Even the alertly humorous Jane Austen falls into this trap often, as in "Sense and Sensibility" (Chapter IV.):

"Of his sense and goodness," continued Elinor, "no one can, I think, be in doubt, who has seen