

AS I LIKE IT—*William Lyon Phelps*

IN one of those poems of Browning which illustrate not the main currents of life, but the oddities, whimsicalities, and byways of the human heart, the poet describes and analyzes the particular affection that an individual may have for some one thing quite obscure, unnoticed by the crowd. "A Likeness" opens with a family in a dining-room, with a certain portrait on the wall ineffably precious to the man of the house; but his wife, congenial in most respects, sees nothing in it but a daub, and the guest-cousin ridicules both the picture and John's love for it; while John suffers as a religious mystic suffers from profanation.

In the second stanza we are taken to the sitting-room of a bachelor, where the apartment is crowded with the spoils of his youth, souvenirs of adventures in sport and gaieties. But once more, one portrait is queen of the place, beloved only by the owner—every visitor laughs at it, thus giving the possessor exquisite torture, akin to physical agony in a sensitive spot.

Finally a man who keeps the one picture he adores in a portfolio among fifty others to which he is indifferent, is showing the whole collection to a friend. Suddenly and surprisingly, for this is the first time such a thing has happened, the friend pauses at the secret prize.

"He stops me—'Festina lente!'
What's that sweet thing there, the etching?
How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,
How my cheeks grow red as tomatoes,
How my heart leaps! But hearts, after leaps, ache."

Browning has given us here a revelation of the peculiar affection that almost every cultivated person has for something precious to him alone; if one ventures to speak of this to acquaintances the almost invariable reply is "I never noticed that," or "I never heard of that," or mere polite wonder that so ordinary a thing can produce so extraordinary an effect.

But after innumerable experiences of

this kind, perhaps on some one occasion the speaker sees in his friend's eyes a sunrise of joy—the delight of unexpected recognition—like meeting one you love in a remote and unexpected locality. "Why, that's just what I have always thought!"

Our emotions then are a queer mixture of the pleasure of confirmation and the pain of jealousy. We rejoice to have our own personal judgment ratified, but the object no longer belongs to us alone—our worship is no longer essential to it.

But I think the chief emotion is pure delight followed by the warmest intimacy, almost like love at first sight. One feels that this person belongs to one—one could travel around the world with him, one would always live in harmony with him; yet such mental and emotional kinship is based on what would seem to others, perhaps, a triviality.

This whimsy may deal with a work of art in poetry, drama, music, painting, architecture, sculpture; or it may relate to something so evanescent as athletic sport, or some remote geographical place, or a mere view.

For example: a boy might say, "Yes, I know Babe Ruth is the most prominent ball-player, but there is a man now playing third base on such and such a minor team, who I think is the greatest of all," his passionate partisanship being swollen by the obscurity of his god.

Or, "Yes, I know the view from the summit of the Rigi is generally admired, but there is another mountain, never starred in the guide-books, never alluded to by tourists, which to me provides the most magnificent view in the world." Imagine meeting a traveller who says, "Why, that's what I have always thought, and you are the first who has mentioned it." You grapple him to your soul with hooks of steel.

There is a passage in the Ninth Symphony which nearly every one seems to regard with no particular emotion, but which is the one phrase of instrumental music that affects me more than any other. It comes right after the ineffably lovely *Adagio molto e cantabile*; Bee-

thoven himself possibly did not think it especially notable, for he gave it to the second violins. I had never met any one who was affected by that as I have been and am, until one day in the smoking-room of a trans-Atlantic liner, the conversation fell on music; I mentioned this passage, and a Harvard professor said he felt about it as I did. I have always regarded that man with intense affection.

Just as there are elective affinities between men and women, and tremendous friendships between men (I suspect that monks in mediæval monasteries had friendships compared with which our best college friendships are thin and pale), so there are authors who seem especially created to appeal to certain individuals. It requires no effort and certainly no peculiarity of taste to admire Shakespeare; it requires oddity not to admire him, which dislike was one of the many eccentricities of Tolstoi. But there are authors, some famous, some infamous, and some obscure, whose works appeal far more strongly to some than to others. Nothing perhaps seems more commonplace and obvious; but I don't mean merely more or less. I mean there are authors who affect us so profoundly that we suffer like physical pain when we hear them disparaged or ridiculed.

Thus, Mr. Santayana, for whose taste and judgment I have high respect, cannot endure the poetry of Browning; he would have been happier if Browning had never lived. Whereas I not only admire the genius and art of Browning, my whole life has been changed by him. For many years I have been a much happier man because of him. He has added enormously to my imponderable assets.

Elizabeth Barrett, before she had ever met Browning or had any thought of meeting him, said that whenever she read an adverse criticism of his work, she felt as if a lash had been laid upon her body.

Of all authors now living, I am the most deeply affected by J. M. Barrie. Gabriel Wells, the famous book-collector, declares it is his belief that of all

contemporary writers of English, the three that stand the best chance of survival are Kipling, Barrie, and Shaw. I admire the works of all three; but my attitude toward the writings of Barrie is quite different, far more than admiration. He touches something in me that responds.

"Mon cœur est un luth suspendu;
Sîtôt qu'on le touche, il résonne."

We know that Doctor Johnson never could read aloud a certain passage in *Dies Irae* without crying:

"Quaerens me sedisti lassus:
Redemisti, crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus."

Yet I suppose hundreds of thousands of intelligent men and women have read those verses without any particular emotion.

Now I am never astonished because certain critics see nothing at all in plays and books that give me a swollen heart; because I am well aware that these matters belong not to the field of knowledge but to taste; and there ought to be no disputing about tastes, though there is and plenty. Yet when Barrie's one-act play, "Barbara's Wedding," presented and acted by an excellent English company, appeared on the New York stage last autumn, its ironical reception by the drama critics distressed me in a way quite different from my feelings had they sneered at Shaw or Kipling. They called it a sentimental little comedy; to me it was a profound tragedy, most deeply affecting. When Barrie himself said in a London speech to the critics that he was "realistic" he spoke the truth to me; he is not sentimental, not whimsical, not wistful, not fantastic, to anything like the degree that he is realistic. His is the drama of ideas rather than of opinions; he deals not with passing fads and fashions, but with the eternal elements of the human heart. The questions and answers in his dialogues are the reverse of the expected; but the moment they are uttered, they are infallible.

In looking back over exactly fifty years of theatre-going, and asking myself what performances made the deepest and most lasting impression, I name:

1. The Passion Play at Oberammergau (1890).
2. Sarah Bernhardt in "La Tosca."
3. Edwin Booth in "Merchant of Venice."
4. Richard Mansfield in "Richard III."
5. Ernst von Possart in "Faust, Part I."
6. Henry Irving in "Louis XI."
7. Mrs. Patrick Campbell in Sudermann's "Magda."
8. Maude Adams in Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows."
9. Katharine Cornell & Co. in "The Barretts of Wimpole Street."
10. William Gillette, Helen Hayes, Louis Calvert in "Dear Brutus."
11. Walter Hampden in "Cyrano de Bergerac."
12. M. de Féraudy in "Les Affaires sont les Affaires."
13. Moscow Artistic Theatre Company in "The Cherry Orchard."
14. Neues und Kleines Theatre Company (Berlin) in Gorki's "Nachtsyl."
15. New Theatre Company (Winthrop Ames) in Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird."
16. N. Y. Theatre Guild in Ervine's "John Ferguson."
17. N. Y. Theatre Guild in Turgenev's "A Month in the Country."
18. Jed Harris's production of "Uncle Vanya."
19. New Theatre Company (Winthrop Ames) in Galsworthy's "Strife."
20. Granville-Barker's production of Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma."
21. Edith Wynne Mathison in "Everyman."

Among the new biographies, I especially commend "Mr. Gladstone," by Professor Walter P. Hall, of Princeton; although in the Preface he calls him "The foremost Englishman of the nineteenth century," the book is by no means undiluted panegyric. Gladstone's mistakes of judgment and of temperament are dealt with faithfully, but the final impression is one of grandeur—or why write the book? Best of all is that we see him as a person rather than as a personage, the fatal error of Osbert Burdett, which destroyed the value of his biography. The high seriousness of Gladstone's mind, his consuming religious passion, his supremacy as an orator, together with a formality that with him was natural, have blinded many (especially in an age like ours) to his humanity. Professor Hall's title, "M." Gladstone, is well chosen. According to our author, only one person ever had the temerity to address him as "Gladstone," and that one was a noble lord—imagine any one calling him "Billy"!

Yet in the circle of his family he was charming. His marriage was most fortunate. Mrs. Gladstone was an absolute thoroughbred, a real Lady, if ever there was one. Her beautiful mind and character were tempered by an irresistible frivolity, a divine carelessness. The Prince of Wales (King Edward), who

knew a Lady when he saw one, admired her profoundly; and Gladstone's political opponent, Lord Salisbury, rather cynical by nature, treated her with reverence.

One should reread, in connection with Mr. Hall's book, the invaluable "Mary Gladstone's Diary," admirably edited by Lucy Masterman. At three A.M., after an exciting session, Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone come running upstairs singing at the top of their voices "A ragamuffin husband and a rantpolling wife!"

Henry W. Nevins's biography of Goethe, written especially for the centenary year (1932), is pertinent for any year. This is a thoroughly good book, giving a clear portrait of Goethe and containing admirable literary criticism. One can easily read it through at a sitting but one cannot easily forget it. Everything uninteresting must have been left out, for nothing uninteresting has been left in.

"Revaluations," a small volume containing addresses by G. K. Chesterton, Lascelles Abercrombie, Captain Liddell Hart, and others, is quite exciting. Here too, is a favorable estimate of Gladstone. Captain Liddell Hart's revaluation of Marshal Foch is destructive. If one has read Guedalla's "Wellington," one will have additional insight on the matter of defense and attack.

Professor Townsend Scudder, 3d, of Swarthmore, has done a fine piece of work in printing from manuscript the hitherto unpublished Letters of Jane Welsh Carlyle to Joseph Neuberger, one of the best friends the Carlyles ever had. These epistles cover the years 1848–1862, and in them Mrs. Carlyle seems to recover her youth.

I salute with joy a little volume "Mrs. Bell," by Mrs. E. S. Drown. Mrs. Bell, the daughter of Rufus Choate, both needed and deserved a Boswell. She was one of the most brilliant conversationalists, one of the most cultivated minds, one of the most charming women in American history. That will sound excessive only to those who did not have the honor of her friendship. Without any literary ambition, she cultivated the fine art of friendship. Every dinner that she attended was a success. I shall never forget her, because she made it easy to believe in those wonderful Parisian women of the eighteenth century for whom age had no terrors.

An extremely interesting autobiography, which cannot at present be bought in a trade edition, is "Fifty Years as Master Mariner," 1835-1917, by the late Captain Christen Julius Klitgaard; his memoirs have been collected and printed in an attractive limited edition, by his son, Carl E. Klitgaard. This is a thoroughly readable book, and gives us not only an account of many stirring adventures on the seven seas, but quite unconsciously the portrait of a really beautiful character, combining masculine courage and resourcefulness, with almost tender consideration for others.

President Nicholas Murray Butler's new book, "Looking Forward," is a collection of addresses that I wish might be read by every intelligent American. President of the largest university in the world, in close intellectual contact with leading minds in Europe and in America, Doctor Butler would seem to have on his hands seven or eight important matters every minute. I have never seen him hurried or nervous or petulant or absent-minded. He is always cool, cheerful, serene. His influence as a Leader has grown steadily in range and impressiveness during the last fifteen years. His influence is growing because he is growing. "Looking Forward" is a challenge—what are we going to do about it?

As President Butler looks to the immediate future so Frederick Lewis Allen looks to the immediate past. Following the admirable example of Mark Sullivan's volumes, "Our Times," Mr. Allen gives the social and political history of America during the eleven years from 1919 to 1931. The advantage of this method is that every one who is able to read a serious book can remember as far back as 1919. In the old days when the average "History of England" closed its last chapter at a date seventy-five years preceding the publication of the book, and when the average "History of English Literature," published in 1890, stopped with Walter Scott, the reader or student felt (to say the least) a sense of incompleteness. Mark Sullivan suggests that we begin with NOW, and go back. The pace of the world has been so accelerated since the war that the things of 1919 already seem remote. The ephemeral nature of slogans should make us sceptical of the value of every new one. History used to be the senti-

mental story of wars; but we ought to regard wars as irrelevancies, as nuisances which interrupt history rather than make it.

An English book of cartoons and commentaries thereupon, similar in manner and style to Frederick Allen and Mark Sullivan, but with a much larger proportion of pictures, is "This Was England," by Alan Bott. Don't miss it.

I can now recommend the best BED BOOK that has appeared since Sir William Rothenstein's "Men and Memories." This is the autobiography of W. Graham Robertson, called "Life Was Worth Living." All persons except those marvellous exceptions who fall asleep the instant they are horizontal, should read in bed. The selection of a book for this purpose is important. I do not advise any one to follow the example of King Ahasuerus, and read *The Congressional Record*, because if one reads a book that is too dry, one cannot forget oneself; and the only chance to forget oneself in slumber is to forget oneself before slumber. On the other hand, one should not read anything connected with one's professional work or any book that is wildly exciting. The best bed books are entertaining biographies or autobiographies of a placid nature. Lincoln Steffens's autobiography should be read when one is fully alert and intends to remain so; it is too full of dynamite to read before sleep. Furthermore, although we now possess this powerful book in a cheaper form, the volume is too heavy to hold in wrists encircled with a nightgown. The mechanics of the bed book should be carefully considered; it must be fairly light in weight, with dull paper, and as big type as possible. "Life Was Worth Living" fills the prescription accurately. Mr. Robertson, an English artist, was intimately acquainted with Sarah Bernhardt, Henry Irving, Whistler, Burne-Jones, and innumerable others of the elect; he talks about them with ineffable charm. Sarah Bernhardt was as great a woman as actress; she had her picture taken in a coffin, because she had been informed, somewhat early in her career, that she was doomed to a speedy death from tuberculosis. Having the courage of a lion and the wisdom of a great psychologist, she made no attempt to run away from the thought of death; she

knew the way to defeat it was to embrace it.

Venienti occurrere morbo!

Her indomitable spirit triumphed over anything and everything, because she was never afraid to face any thought that entered her mind. She *tried* to think of terrors, instead of trying not to think of them. And her life-long motto, engraved on her letter-paper, was worthy of Cyrano de Bergerac or D'Artagnan:

QUAND MEME!

Thirty years ago I was sitting in my house in Michigan when the post arrived bringing a new novel. It was "The Inn of the Silver Moon," by Herman Knickerbocker Vielé. I read the book from first word to last, without leaving my chair. Then I turned back to the first page and read the whole book again. This is the only time I have read a book through twice at one sitting. Therefore I welcome the new edition of this beguiling novel.

Along with it comes another reprint, equally pleasure-giving. This is "A Happy Boy," by Björnsterne Björnson. And when you have read this through—which won't take more than ninety minutes—read two other novels by the same man—"Synnöve Solbakken" and "The Fisher Maiden," which incidentally make a splendid preparation for a visit to Norway.

Booth Tarkington's new novel, "Mary's Neck," which has nothing to do with the anatomy of a woman, is full of entertainment and shrewd though affectionate satire.

Francis Brett Young's novel, "Mr. and Mrs. Pennington," is enjoying a deservedly big circulation. It is a good story well told—and the contrast between husband and wife is well emphasized. I am myself, however, not so hopeful of the future of this particular marriage as the author seems to be. Imagination is made realistic by memory.

One of the best drama critics in America is Richard Dana Skinner, who has a weekly article in that excellent periodical, *The Commonwealth*. He has done well to collect his critical essays in a volume—"Our Changing Theatre," which every one interested will do well to buy.

And here are some thrillers: "The

Fatal Five Minutes," by R. A. J. Walling: "Safe Custody," by Dornford Yates: "The Capital City Mystery," by J. H. Wallis: "The Murder of Christine Wilmerding," by W. B. M. Ferguson: "A Clue from the Stars," by Eden Phillpotts: "Top-Story Murder," by Anthony Berkeley: and last, but not least, "Murder at Arondale Farm," by John Hawk.

From Doctor L. L. Rice, of Clearwater, Fla.:

"In your recent review of Clara Clemens's volume I find the words: 'Now if one wants to know what kind of a man was Mark Twain, etc.'"

"No doubt your secretary was responsible for the incorporation of the indefinite article. If so, may I courteously suggest that you remind her—I have had to remind my own secretary to this end—that many people are acutely sensitive to this particular violation of propriety? The use of 'wants' in place of 'wishes' may be sanctioned—as you assume by the use of it—but the confounding of the particular and the general, never, notwithstanding many writers use the indefinite article after 'sort' and 'kind.'"

"Is not the point well taken?"

But it was not my secretary's fault; I do not dictate these articles. I tread the winepress alone. Thus it was my fault and I am grateful for the correction.

From the accomplished Frank J. Wilstach:

"When I was making my 'Dictionary of Similes' and ransacking literature, I came across the following by Coleridge, to wit: 'Ignorant as a bookseller.' Since that far-off day I have found many a justification for Coleridge's comparison. I recalled it just now looking through — & — catalogue, fall and winter

1931-32. In brief, you will discover that the ignorant bookseller in writing a description of the 'Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh' was unaware that the writer of the letter was our old friend, Sir Walter, professor of English at Oxford, and so, as you will see, has gone back to a biography of Elizabeth's Sir Walter, imagining he was the author of the Letters. Note also that the date of birth of the original Sir Walter is given as 1852,—a mistake of a mere 300 years to a day.

Item 224. *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh* (1879-1922). Sir Walter Raleigh was one of the most brilliant and heroic of the great men who adorned the reign of Elizabeth. He was born in 1852, at Hayes Manor. . . .

Recent members of the Faery Queene Club. Miss Lois Lilley Howe, F. A. I. A., of Boston, has the unique distinction of having read the entire poem aloud to her sister, who was well over eighty years of age. It took nine months to finish reading the work and both ladies enjoyed it immensely. Miss Lucille Rowland of Phoenix, Ariz., also joins the club, having joyfully completed the reading; her qualifications are certified by A. F. Olney, Head of the Department of English, Phoenix Union High School. P. O. Powell, master and county deputy of Dallas, Ore., and graduate of the Yale Divinity School, 1890, also enters the club this month. Grace Warren Londrum, Dean of Women in the College of William and Mary, Virginia, a prominent member of the F. Q. Club, and a propagandist for Spenser, recently addressed a group of intelligent students in Norfolk "on the most widely praised of the least read English poets."

Frederic Lawrence Jones, a student

at Kalamazoo College, has read the poem, and says he enjoyed it. And Elizabeth P. Elliott, who has been teaching for fifty years, writes from Nashville, Tenn.: "Have read many books, but of them all none have afforded more joy or left more satisfactory memories." And Lester David, of New York University, has not only read the whole poem (in six months) but has been inspired to make upon it a two-hour speech. Mrs. Samuel H. Wilson, of Leavenworth, Kansas, joins happily and triumphantly, in spite of the fact that she has recently broken her right arm, and is obliged to record her Spenserian victory in a sinister fashion. Incidentally, she, like Sir James Barrie, writes more legibly with the left hand than most people do with the other. And note also her fine use of the English language, which I commend to Americans:

"I broke my right arm recently and have not as yet *got* used to writing with my left hand."

I have been forced to call a halt on letters concerning the word *siblings*. But I wish to thank all who have written me on this theme. Letters have come from every part of the world, many of them from professional physicians. This proves the general interest in the correct usage of English and the wide circulation of SCRIBNER'S.

What's in a label? From the Foreword of Matthew Josephson's "Jean-Jacques Rousseau":

"even that beloved Victorian, John Morley."

From "Mr. Gladstone," by Walter P. Hall:

"Lord Morley, by temperament, sympathy, and scholarship, belongs to the eighteenth century. Gladstone was a Victorian."

BOOKS MENTIONED, WITH AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS

"Autobiography," by Lincoln Steffens. (New ed.) Harcourt, Brace. \$3.75.
 "Fifty Years as Master Mariner," by Captain Klitgaard. New York: Limited.
 "Only Yesterday," by Frederick Lewis Allen. Harpers. \$3.
 "Mary Gladstone's Diary," ed. Lucy Masterman. Dutton. \$3.
 "Mr. Gladstone," by Walter Phelps Hall. Norton. \$3.
 "Letters of J. W. Carlyle to J. Neuberger," ed. T. Scudder. Oxford. \$1.25.
 "Goethe," by H. W. Nevins. Harcourt, Brace. \$2.75.
 "Looking Forward," by Nicholas Murray Butler. Scribners. \$3.

"This Was England," by Alan Bott. Illustrated. Doubleday, Doran. \$3.50.
 "Our Changing Theatre," by R. Dana Skinner. Dial. \$3.
 "Revaluations," by Chesterton and Others. Oxford. \$2.50.
 "Mrs. Bell," by Mrs. E. S. Drown. Houghton, Mifflin.
 "Mary's Neck," by Booth Tarkington. Doubleday, Doran. \$2.50.
 "Mr. and Mrs. Pennington," by F. B. Young. Harpers. \$2.50.
 "A Clue from the Stars," by Eden Phillpotts. Macmillan. \$2.
 "Top-Story Murder," by Anthony Berkeley. Doubleday, Doran. \$2.

"Safe Custody," by Dornford Yates. Minton, Balch. \$2.
 "The Fatal Five Minutes," by R. A. J. Walling. Morrow. \$2.
 "The Capital City Mystery," by J. H. Wallis. Dutton. \$2.
 "The Murder of Christine Wilmerding," by W. B. M. Ferguson. \$2.
 "Murder at Arondale Farm," by J. Hawk. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.
 "The Inn of the Silver Moon," by H. K. Vié. Duffield Green. \$1.25.
 "A Happy Boy," by B. Björnson. Macmillan. \$2.
 "Life Was Worth Living," by W. G. Robertson. Harpers. \$5.

A PORTRAIT OF BASCOM HAWKE *Continued from page 198*

When Bascom talked, you may be sure God listened: he preached magnificently, his gaunt face glowing from the pulpit, his rather high, enormously vibrant voice, husky with emotion. His prayers were fierce solicitations of God, so mad with fervor that his audiences felt uncomfortably they came close to blasphemy. But, unhappily, on occasions my uncle's mad eloquence grew too much for him: his voice, always too near the heart of passion, would burst in splinters, and he would fall violently forward across his lectern, his face covered by his great gaunt fingers, sobbing horribly.

This, in the Middle West, where his first church had been, does not go down so well—yet it may be successful if one weeps mellowly, joyfully—smiling bravely through the tears—at a lovely aisle processional of repentant sinners; but Bascom, who chose uncomfortable titles for his sermons, would be overcome by his powerful feelings on these occasions when his topic was “Potiphar’s Wife,” “Ruth, the Girl in the Corn,” “The Whores of Babylon,” “The Woman on the Roof,” and so on.

His head was too deeply engaged with his conscience—he was in turn Episcopal, Presbyterian, Unitarian, searching through the whole roaring confusion of Protestantism for a body of doctrine with which he could agree. And, he was forever finding it, and later forever renouncing what he had found. At forty, the most liberal of Unitarians, the strains of agnosticism were piping madly through his sermons: he began to hint at his new faith in prose which he modelled on the mighty utterance of Carlyle, and in poetry, in what he deemed the manner of Matthew Arnold. His professional connection with the Unitarians, and indeed with the Baptists, Methodists, Holy Rollers, and Seventh Day Adventists, came to an abrupt ending after he read from his pulpit one morning a composition in verse entitled *The Agnostic*, which made up in concision what it lacked in melody, and which ended each stanza sadly, but very plainly, on this recurrence:

“I do not know:
It may be so.”

Thus, when he was almost fifty Bascom Hawke stopped preaching in public. There was no question where he was going. He had his family's raging lust for property. He became a “conveyancer”; he acquired enough of the law of property to convey titles; but he began to buy pieces of land in the suburbs of Boston, and to build small cheap houses, using his own somewhat extraordinary designs to save the architect's fees and, wherever possible, doing such odd jobs as laying the foundations, installing the plumbing, and painting the structure.

He regarded the price of everything as exorbitant—his furious anguish over the wages of labor was marvellous to behold: it drove him raging home, where he stamped insanely upon the floors in his fury, declaring that the Italians, Irish, Belgians, Poles, Swiss, and Yankees—or whatever unfortunate race had been represented in the last bill of charges—were infamous scoundrels, foul and dishonest cutthroats, engaged in a conspiracy to empty both his purse and his cupboard. He called upon them the entire and plenteous artillery of his abuse, his high husky voice ascending to a scream until, his own powers failing him, there flashed in him for a moment remembrance of one mightier than he, the most terribly eloquent of all earth's thunderers—his obscene and gargantuan partner, John T. Brill; and lifting his shaking hands toward Heaven, he would invoke God and Brill at the same time.

Like others in his family seared with a terrible and minute memory of war and hunger, he fled before the skeleton spectre of poverty: he was of that race which expects to avert starvation by eating sparingly.

Therefore, he mended his own shoes and wore historic clothing; he fiercely sowed and reaped the produce of his stony garden, and contrived in countless other ways to thwart the forces of organized extortion.

The small houses that he—no, he did not build them!—he went through the

agonies of monstrous childbirth to produce them, he licked, nursed, and fondled them into stunted growth, and he sold them on long, but profitable terms to small Irish, Jewish, Negro, Belgian, Italian and Greek laborers and tradesmen. And at the conclusion of a sale, or after receiving from one of these men the current payment, Uncle Bascom went homeward in a delirium of joy, shouting in a loud voice, to all who might be compelled to listen, the merits of the Jews, Belgians, Irish, Swiss or Greeks.

“Finest people in the world! No question about it!”—this last being his favorite exclamation in all moments of payment or conviction.

For when they paid, he loved them. Often on Sundays they would come to pay him tramping over the frozen ground or the packed snow through street after street of smutty gray-looking houses in the flat weary-looking suburb where he lived. To this dismal heath, therefore, they came, the swarthy children of a dozen races, clad in the hard and decent blacks in which the poor pay debts and go to funerals. They would advance across the barren lands, the harsh sere earth scarred with its wastes of rust and rubbish, passing stolidly by below the blank board fences of a brick yard, crunching doggedly through the lanes of dirty rutted ice, passing before the gray besmudged fronts of wooden houses which in their stark, desolate, and unspeakable ugliness seemed to give a complete and final utterance to an architecture of weariness, sterility and horror, so overwhelming in its absolute desolation that it seemed as if the painful and indignant soul of man must sicken and die at length before it, stricken, stupefied, and strangled without a tongue to articulate the curse that once had blazed in him.

And at length they would pause before my uncle's little house—one of a street of little houses which he had built there on the barren flatlands of the suburb, and to which he had given magnificently his own name—Hawke Heights—although the only eminence in all that flat and weary waste was a

stunted and almost imperceptible rise a half mile off. And here along this street which he had built, these little houses, warped, yet strong and hardy, seemed to burrow down solidly like moles for warmth into the ugly stony earth on which they were built and to cower and huddle doggedly below the immense and terrible desolation of the northern sky, with its rimy sun-hazed lights, its fierce and cruel rags and stripes of wintry red, its raw and savage harshness. And then, gripping their greasy little wads of money, as if the knowledge that all reward below these fierce and cruel skies must be wrenched painfully and minutely from a stony earth, they went in to pay my uncle. He would come up to meet them from some lower cellar-depth, swearing, muttering, and banging doors; and he would come toward them howling greetings, buttoned to his chin in the frayed and faded sweater, gnarled, stooped and frosty-looking, clutching his great hands together at his waist. Then they would wait, stiffly, clumsily, fingering their hats, while with countless squints and grimaces and pursings of the lip, he scrawled out painfully their receipt—their fractional release from debt and labor, one more hard-won step toward the freedom of possession.

At length, having pocketed their money and finished the transaction, he would not permit them to depart at once, he would howl urgently at them an invitation to stay, he would offer long weedy-looking cigars to them, and they would sit uncomfortably, crouching on their buttock bones like stalled oxen, at the edges of chairs, shyly and dumbly staring at him, while he howled question, comment, and enthusiastic tribute at them.

"Why, my dear sir!" he would yell at Makropolos, the Greek. "You have a glorious past, a history of which any nation might well be proud!"

"Sure, sure!" said Makropolos, nodding vigorously. "Beeg Heestory!"

"The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!" my uncle howled, "where burning Sappho loved and sung—" (Phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh!)

"Sure, sure!" said Makropolos again, nodding good-naturedly but wrinkling his lowering finger's-breadth of brow in a somewhat puzzled fashion. "Tha's right! You got it!"

"Why, my dear sir!" Uncle Bascom

cried. "It has been the ambition of my lifetime to visit those hallowed scenes, to stand at sunrise on the Acropolis, to explore the glory that was Greece, to see the magnificent ruins of the noblest of ancient civ-i-liz-a-tions!"

For the first time a dark flush, a flush of outraged patriotism, began to burn upon the swarthy yellow of Mr. Makropolos' cheek: his manner became heavy and animated, and in a moment he said with passionate conviction:

"No, no, no! No ruin! Wat you t'ink, eh! Athens fine town! We got a million pipples dere!" He struggled for a word, then cupped his hairy paws indefinitely: "You know? Beeg! O, ni-ez!" he added greasily, with a smile. "Everyt'ing good! We got everyt'ing good dere as you got here! You know?" he said with a confiding and painful effort. "Everyt'ing ni-ez! Not old! No, no, no!" he cried with a rising and indignant vigor. "New! de same as here? Ni-ez! You get good and cheap—everyt'ing! Beeg place, new house, dumbwaiter, elevator—wat chew like!—oh, ni-ez!" he said earnestly. "Wat chew t'ink it cost, eh? Feefateen dollar a month! Sure, sure!" he nodded with a swarthy earnestness. "I wouldn't keed you!"

"Finest people on earth!" my uncie Bascom cried with an air of great conviction and satisfaction. "No question about it!"—and he would usher his visitor to the door howling farewells into the terrible desolation of those savage skies.

Meanwhile, my Aunt Louise, although she had not heard a word of what was said, although she had listened to nothing except the periods of Uncle Bascom's heavily accented and particular speech, kept up a constant snuffling laughter punctuated momentarily by faint whoops as she bent over her pots and pans in the kitchen, pausing from time to time as if to listen, and then snuffling to herself as she shook her head in pitying mirth which rose again up to the crisis of a faint crazy cackle as she scoured the pan; because, of course, during the forty-five years of her life with him thoroughly, imperceptibly, and completely, she had gone mad, and no longer knew or cared to know whether these words had just been spoken or were the echoes of lost voices long ago.

And again, she would pause to listen, with her small birdlike features

uplifted gleefully in a kind of mad attentiveness as the door slammed and he stumped muttering back into the house, intent upon the secret designs of his own life, as remote and isolate from her as if they had each dwelt on separate planets, although the house they lived in was a small one.



The union of Bascom and Louise had been blessed by four children, all of whom had left their father's bed and board when they discovered how simple it is to secure an abundance of food, warmth, clothing, shelter and freedom in the generous world, whether by marriage, murder, or simply by hard labor. Of them, however, remarkable as their lives have been, it is not necessary to speak here, for he had forgotten them, they no longer touched his life: he had the power to forget, he belonged to a more ancient, a more lonely earth.

Such, briefly, had been the history of the old man who now stood before this dusty office. His life had come up from the wilderness, the buried past, the lost America. The potent mystery of old events and moments had passed around him, and the magic light of dark time fell across him.

Like all men in this land, he had been a wanderer, an exile on the immortal earth. Like all of us he had no home. Wherever great wheels carried him was home.

In the office which Bascom Hawke now entered there were two rooms, one in front and one behind, L shaped, and set in the elbow of the building, so that one might look out at the two projecting wings of the building, and see lighted layers of offices, in which the actors of a dozen enterprises "took" dictation, clattered at typewriters, walked back and forth importantly, talked into telephones or, what they did with amazing frequency, folded their palms behind their skulls, placed their feet restfully on the nearest solid object, and gazed for long periods dreamily and tenderly at the ceilings.

Through the broad and usually very dirty panes of the window in the front office one could catch a glimpse of Faneuil Hall and the magnificent and exultant activity of the markets.

These dingy offices, however, from

which a corner of this rich movement might be seen and felt, were merely the unlovely counterpart of millions of others throughout the country and, in the telling phrase of Baedeker, offered "little that need detain the tourist": a few chairs, two scarred roll-top desks, a typist's table, a battered safe with a pile of thumb-worn ledgers on top of it, a set of green filing cases, an enormous green, greasy water-jar always half filled with a rusty liquid that no one drank, and two spittoons, put there because Brill was a man who chewed and spat widely in all directions—this, save for placards, each bearing several photographs of houses with their prices written below them—8 rooms, Dorchester, \$6,500; 5 rooms and garage, Melrose, \$4,500, etc.—completed the furniture of the room, and the second room, save for the disposition of objects, was similarly adorned.

To reach his own "office," as Bascom Hawke called the tiny cubicle in which he worked and received his clients, the old man had to traverse the inner room and open a door in a flimsy partition of varnished wood and glazed glass at the other end. This was his office: it was really a very narrow slice cut off from the larger room, and in it there was barely space for one large dirty window, an ancient dilapidated desk and swivel chair, a very small battered safe, buried under stacks of yellowed newspapers, and a small bookcase with glass doors and two small shelves on which there were a few worn volumes. An inspection of these books would have revealed four or five tattered and musty law books in their ponderous calf-skin bindings—one on *Contracts*, one on *Real Property*, one on *Titles*—a two-volume edition of the poems of Matthew Arnold, very dog-eared and thumbed over, a copy of *Sartor Resartus*, also much used, a volume of the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the *Iliad* in Greek with minute yellowed notations in the margins, a volume of the *World Almanac* several years old, and a very worn volume of the Holy Bible, greatly used and annotated in Bascom's small, stiffly laborious, and meticulous hand.

If the old man was a little late, as sometimes happened, he might find his colleagues there before him. Miss Muriel Brill, the typist, and the eldest daughter of Mr. John T. Brill, would be

seated in her typist's chair, her heavy legs crossed as she bent over to undo the metal latches of the thick galoshes she wore during the winter season. It is true there were also other seasons when Miss Brill did not wear galoshes, but so sharply and strongly do our memories connect people with certain gestures which, often for an inscrutable reason, seem characteristic of them, that any frequent visitor to these offices at this time of day would doubtless have remembered Miss Brill as always unfastening her galoshes. But the probable reason is that some people inevitably belong to seasons, and this girl's season was winter—not blizzards or howling winds, or the blind skirl and sweep of snow, but gray, grim, raw, thick, implacable winter: the endless successions of gray days and gray monotony. There was no spark of color in her, her body was somewhat thick and heavy, her face was white, dull, and thick-featured and instead of tapering downwards, it tapered up: it was small above, and thick and heavy below, and even in her speech, the words she uttered seemed to have been chosen by an automaton, and could only be remembered later by their desolate banality. One always remembered her as saying as one entered: "... Hello! ... You're becoming quite a stranger! ... It's been some time since you was around, hasn't it? ... I was thinkin' the otheh day it had been some time since you was around. ... I'd begun to think you had forgotten us. ... Well, how've you been? Lookin' the same as usual, I see. ... Me? ... Oh, can't complain. ... Keepin' busy? I'll say! I manage to keep goin'. ... Who you lookin' for? Father? He's in there. ... Why, yeah! Go right on in."



This was Miss Brill, and at the moment that she bent to unfasten her galoshes, it is likely that Mr. Samuel Friedman would also be there in the act of rubbing his small dry hands briskly together, or of rubbing the back of one hand with the palm of the other in order to induce circulation. He was a small youngish man, a pale somewhat meagre-looking little Jew with a sharp ferret face: he, too, was a person who goes to "fill in" those vast swarming masses of people along the pave-

ments and in the subway—the mind cannot remember them or absorb the details of their individual appearance but they people the earth, they make up life. Mr. Friedman had none of the richness, color, and humor that some members of his race so abundantly possess, the succession of gray days, the grim weather seemed to have entered his soul as it enters the souls of many different races there—the Irish, the older New England stock, even the Jews—and it gives them a common touch that is prim, drab, careful, tight and sour. Mr. Friedman also wore galoshes, his clothes were neat, drab, a little worn and shiny, there was an odor of steamy thawing dampness and warm rubber about him as he rubbed his dry little hands saying: "Chee! How I hated to leave that good wahm bed this morning! When I got up I said, 'Holy Chee!' My wife says, 'Whatsa mattah?' I says, 'Holy Chee! You step out heah a moment where I am an' you'll see whatsa mattah.' 'Is it cold?' she says. 'Is it cold! I'll tell the cock-eyed wuhld!' I says. Chee! You could have cut the frost with an axe: the watch in the pitchehs was frozen hahd; an' she has the nuhve to ask me if it's cold! 'Is it cold!' I says. 'Do you know any more funny stories?' I says. O how I do love my bed! Chee! I kept thinkin' of that guy in Braintree I got to go see to-day an' the more I thought about him, the less I liked him! I thought my feet would tu'n into two blocks of ice before I got the funniss stahted! 'Chee! I hope the ole bus is still workin,' I says. 'If I've got to go thaw that damned thing out,' I says, 'I'm ready to quit.' Chee! Well, suh, I neveh had a bit of trouble: she stahted right up an' the way that ole moteh was workin' is nobody's business."

During the course of this monologue Miss Brill would give ear and assent from time to time by the simple interjection: "Uh!" It was a sound she uttered frequently, it had somewhat the same meaning as "Yes," but it was more non-committal than "Yes." It seemed to render assent to the speaker, to let him know that he was being heard and understood, but it did not commit the auditor to any opinion, or to any real agreement.

The third member of this office staff, who was likely to be present at this time, was a gentleman named Stanley

P. Ward. Mr. Stanley P. Ward was a neat middling figure of a man, aged fifty or thereabouts; he was plump and had a pink tender skin, a trim Vandyke, and a nice comfortable little pot of a belly which slipped snugly into the well-pressed and well-brushed garments that always fitted him so tidily. He was a bit of a fop, and it was at once evident that he was quietly but enormously pleased with himself. He carried himself very sprucely, he took short rapid steps and his neat little paunch gave his figure a movement not unlike that of a pouter pigeon. He was usually in quiet but excellent spirits, he laughed frequently and a smile—rather a subtly amused look—was generally playing about the edges of his mouth. That smile and his laugh made some people vaguely uncomfortable: there was a kind of deliberate falseness in them, as if what he really thought and felt was not to be shared with other men. He seemed, in fact, to have discovered some vital and secret power, some superior knowledge and wisdom, from which the rest of mankind was excluded, a sense that he was “chosen” above other men, and this impression of Mr. Stanley Ward would have been correct, for he was a Christian Scientist, he was a pillar of the church, and a very big church at that—for Mr. Ward, dressed in fashionable striped trousers, rubber soles, and a cut-away coat might be found somewhere under the mighty dome of the Mother Church on Huntington Avenue every Sunday suavely, noiselessly, and expertly ushering the faithful to their pews.



This completes the personnel of the first office of the John T. Brill Realty Company, and if my uncle, Bascom Hawke, arrived late, if these three people were already present, if Mr. Bascom Hawke had not been defrauded of any part of his worldly goods by some contriving rascal, of whom the world has many, if his life had not been imperilled by some speed maniac, if the damnable New England weather was not too damnable, if, in short, Bascom Hawke was in fairly good spirits he would on entering immediately howl in a high, rapid, remote and perfectly monotonous tone: “Hello, Hello, Hello! Good-morn-

ing, Good-morning, Good-morning!”—after which he would close his eyes, grimace horribly, press his rubbery lip against his big horse teeth, and snuffle with laughter through his nose, as if pleased by a tremendous stroke of wit. At this demonstration the other members of the group would glance at one another with those knowing subtly supercilious nods and winks, that look of common self-congratulation and humor with which the more “normal” members of society greet the conduct of an eccentric, and Mr. Samuel Friedman would say: “What’s the matteh with you, Pop? You look happy. Some one musta give you a shot in the ahm.”

At which, a coarse powerful voice, deliberate and rich with its intimation of immense and earthy vulgarity, might roar out of the depth of the inner office: “No, I’ll tell you what it is.” Here the great figure of Mr. John T. Brill, the head of the business, would darken the doorway. “Don’t you know what’s wrong with the Reverend? It’s that widder he’s been takin’ around.” Here, the phlegmy burble that prefaced all of Mr. Brill’s obscenities would appear in his voice, the shadow of a lewd smile would play around the corner of his mouth: “It’s the widder. She’s let him—”

At this delicate stroke of humor, the burble would burst open in Mr. Brill’s great red throat, and he would roar with that high, choking, phlegmy laughter that is frequent among big red-faced men. Mr. Friedman would laugh drily (“Heh, heh, heh, heh, heh!”), Mr. Stanley Ward would laugh more heartily, but complacently, and Miss Brill would snicker in a coy and subdued manner as became a modest young girl. As for Bascom Hawke, if he was really in a good humor, he might snuffle with nose-y laughter, bend double at his meagre waist, clutching his big hands together, and stamp at the floor violently several times with one stringy leg; he might even go so far as to take a random ecstatic kick at objects, still stamping and snuffling with laughter, and prod Miss Brill stiffly with two enormous bony fingers, as if he did not wish the full point and flavor of the jest to be lost on her.

My uncle, Bascom Hawke, however, was a very complicated person with many moods, and if Mr. Brill’s fooling

did not catch him in a receptive one, he might contort his face in a pucker of refined disgust, and mutter his disapproval, as he shook his head rapidly from side to side. Or he might rise to great heights of moral denunciation, beginning at first in a grave low voice that showed the seriousness of the words he had to utter: “The lady to whom you refer,” he would begin, “the very charming and cultivated lady whose name, sir,” here his voice would rise on its howling note and he would wag his great bony forefinger, “whose name, sir, you have so foully traduced and blackened—”

“No, I wasn’t, Reverend. I was only tryin’ to whiten it,” said Mr. Brill, beginning to burble with laughter.

“—whose name, sir, you have so foully traduced and blackened with your smutty suggestions,” Bascom continued implacably, “—that lady is known to me, as you very well know, sir,” he howled, wagging his great finger again, “solely and simply in a professional capacity.”

“Why, hell, Reverend,” said Mr. Brill innocently, “I never knew she was a professional. I thought she was an amateur.”

At this conclusive stroke, Mr. Brill would make the whole place tremble with his laughter, Mr. Friedman would laugh almost noiselessly, holding himself weakly at the stomach and bending across a desk, Mr. Ward would have short bursts and fits of laughter, as he gazed out the window, shaking his head deprecatingly from time to time, as if his more serious nature disapproved, and Miss Brill would snicker, and turn to her machine, remarking: “This conversation is getting too rough for me!”

And my uncle, if this jesting touched his complex soul at one of those moments when such profanity shocked him, would walk away, confiding into vacancy, it seemed, with his powerful and mobile features contorted in the most eloquent expression of disgust and loathing ever seen on any face, the while he muttered, in a resonant whisper that shuddered with passionate revulsion: “Oh bad! Oh bad! O bad, bad, bad!”—shaking his head slightly from side to side with each word.

Yet there were other times, when Brill’s swingeing vulgarity, the vast coarse sweep of his profanity not only

found Uncle Bascom in a completely receptive mood, but they evoked from him gleeful responses, counter essays in swearing which he made slyly, craftily, snickering with pleasure and squinting around at his listeners at the sound of the words, and getting such stimulus from them as might a renegade clergyman, exulting in a feeling of depravity and abandonment for the first time.



To the other people in this office—that is, to Friedman, Ward and Muriel, the stenographer—my uncle was always an enigma; at first they had observed his peculiarities of speech and dress, his eccentricity of manner, and the sudden, violent, and complicated fluctuation of his temperament, with astonishment and wonder, then with laughter and ridicule, and now, with dull, uncomprehending acceptance. Nothing he did or said surprised them any more, they had no understanding and little curiosity, they accepted him as a fact in the gray schedule of their lives. Their relation to him was habitually touched by a kind of patronizing banter—“kidding the old boy along” they would have called it—by the communication of smug superior winks and the conspiracy of feeble jests, and in this there was something base and ignoble, for my uncle was a better man than any of them.

He did not notice any of this, it is not likely he would have cared if he had, for, like most eccentrics, his thoughts were usually buried in a world of his own creating to whose every fact and feeling and motion he was the central actor. Again, as much as any of his extraordinary family, he had carried with him throughout his life the sense that he was “fated”—a sense that was strong in all of them—that his life was pivotal to all the actions of providence, that, in short, the time might be out of joint, but not himself. Nothing but death could shake his powerful egotism, and his occasional storms of fury, his railing at the world, his tirades of invective at some motorist, pedestrian, or laborer occurred only when he discovered that these people were moving in a world at cross-purposes to his own and that some action of theirs had disturbed or shaken the logic of his universe.

It was curious that, of all the people in the office, the person who had the deepest understanding and respect for my uncle was John T. Brill. Mr. Brill was a huge creature of elemental desires and passions: a river of profanity rushed from his mouth with the relentless sweep and surge of the Mississippi, he could no more have spoken without swearing than a whale could swim in a frog-pond—he swore at everything, at every one, and with every breath, casually and unconsciously, and yet when he addressed my uncle Bascom his oath was always impersonal, and tinged subtly by a feeling of respect.

Thus, he would speak to Uncle Bascom somewhat in this fashion: “God-damn it, Hawke, did you ever look up the title for that stuff in Malden? That feller’s been callin’ up every day to find out about it.”

“Which fellow?” my uncle Bascom asked precisely. “The man from Cambridge?”

“No,” said Mr. Brill, “not him, the other — — —, the Dorchester feller. How the hell am I goin’ to tell him anything if there’s no goddamn title for the stuff?”

Profane and typical as this speech was, it was always shaded nicely with impersonality toward my uncle Bascom—conscious to the full of the distinction between “damn *it*” and “damn *you*.” Toward his other colleagues, however, Mr. Brill was neither nice nor delicate.

Brill was an enormous man physically: he was six feet two or three inches tall, and his weight was close to three hundred pounds. He was totally bald, his skull was a gleaming satiny pink; above his great red moon of face, with its ponderous and pendulous jowls, it looked almost egg-shaped. And in the heavy, deliberate, and powerful timbre of his voice there was always lurking this burble of exultant, gargantuan obscenity: it was so obviously part of the structure of his life, so obviously his only and natural means of expression, that it was impossible to condemn him. His epithet was limited and repetitive—but so, too, was Homer’s, and, like Homer, he saw no reason for changing what had already been used and found good.

He was a lewd and innocent man. Like my uncle, by comparison with these other people, he seemed to belong

to some earlier, richer and grander period of the earth, and perhaps this was why there was more actual kinship and understanding between them than between any of the other members of the office. These other people—Friedman, Brill’s daughter, Muriel, and Ward—belonged to the myriads of the earth, to those numberless swarms that with ceaseless pullulation fill the streets of life with their gray immemorable tides. But Brill and my uncle Bascom were men in a thousand, a million: if one had seen them in a crowd he would have looked after them, if one had talked with them, he could never have forgotten them.

It is rare in modern life that one sees a man who can express himself with such complete and abundant certainty as Brill did—completely, and without doubt or confusion. It is true that his life expressed itself chiefly by two gestures—by profanity and by his great roar of full-throated, earth-shaking laughter, an explosive comment on existence which usually concluded and summarized his other means of expression.

Although the other people in the office laughed heartily at this soaring rhetoric of obscenity, it sometimes proved too much for Uncle Bascom. When this happened he would either leave the office immediately, or stump furiously into his own little cupboard that seemed silted over with the dust of twenty years, slamming the door behind him so violently that the thin partition rattled, and then stand for a moment pursing his lips, and convolving his features with incredible speed, and shaking his gaunt head slightly from side to side, until at length he whispered in a tone of passionate disgust and revulsion: “Oh, *bad! Bad! Bad!* By every *gesture*, by every *act*, he betrays the *boor*, the *vulgarian!* Can you imagine”—here his voice sunk even lower in its scale of passionate whispering repugnance—“can you for one *moment* imagine a man of *breeding* and the social graces talking in such a way publicly?—And before his own daughter. Oh, *bad! Bad! Bad! Bad!*”

And in the silence, while my uncle stood shaking his head in its movement of downcast and convulsive distaste, we could hear, suddenly, Brill’s pungent answer to all the world—and his great bellow of throaty laughter. Later

on, if my uncle had to consult him on any business, he would open his door abruptly, walk out into Brill's office clutching his hands together at the waist, and with disgust still carved upon his face, say: "Well, sir, . . . If you have concluded your morning devotions," here his voice sank to a bitter snarl, "we might get down to the transaction of some of the day's business."

"Why, Reverend!" Brill roared. "You ain't heard nothin' yet!"

And the great choking bellow of laughter would burst from him again, rattling the windows with its power as he hurled his great weight backward, with complete abandon, in his creaking swivel-chair.



It was obvious that he liked to tease my uncle, and never lost an opportunity of doing so: for example, if any one gave Uncle Bascom a cigar, Brill would exclaim with an air of innocent surprise: "Why, *Reverend*, you're not going to smoke that, are you?"

"Why, certainly," my uncle Bascom said tartly. "That is the purpose for which it was intended, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," said Brill, "but you know how they make 'em, don't you? I didn't think you'd touch it after some dirty old Spaniard has wiped his old hands all over it—yes! an' *spit* upon it, too, because that's what they do!"

"Ah!" my uncle snarled contemptuously. "You don't know what you're talking about! There is nothing cleaner than good tobacco! Finest and healthiest plant on earth! No question about it!"

"Well," said Brill, "I've learned something. We live and learn, Reverend. You've taught me somethin' worth knowing: when it's free it's clean; when you have to pay for it it stinks like hell!" He pondered heavily for a moment, and the burble began to play about in his great throat: "And by God!" he concluded, "tobacco's not the only thing that applies to, either. Not by a damned sig^ht!"

Again, one morning, my uncle cleared his throat portentously, coughed, and suddenly said to me: "Now, David, my boy, you are going to have lunch with me to-day. There's no question about it whatever!" This was astonishing news, for he had never before invited me to

eat with him when I came to his office, although I had been to his house for dinner many times. "Yes, sir!" he said, with an air of decision and satisfaction. "I have thought it all over. There is a splendid establishment in the basement of this building—small, of course, but everything clean and of the highest order! It is conducted by an Irish gentleman whom I have known for many years. Finest people on earth: no question about it!"

It was an astonishing and momentous occasion; I knew how infrequently he went to a restaurant. Having made his decision, Uncle Bascom immediately stepped into the outer offices, and began to discuss and publish his intentions with the greatest satisfaction.

"Yes, sir!" he said in a precise tone, smacking his lips in a ruminant fashion, and addressing himself to every one rather than to a particular person. "We shall go in and take our seats in the regular way, and I shall then give appropriate instructions, to one of the attendants—" again he smacked his lips as he pronounced this word with such an indescribable air of relish, that immediately my mouth began to water, and the delicious pangs of appetite and hunger began to gnaw my vitals—"I shall say: 'This is my nephew, a young man now enrolled at Harvard Un-i-ver-sit-tee!'"—here Bascom smacked his lips together again with that same maddening air of relish—"Yes, sir' (I shall say!)—"You are to fulfil his order without *stint*, without *delay*, and without *question*, and to the *utmost* of your ability"—he howled, wagging his great bony forefinger through the air—"As for myself," he declared abruptly, "I shall take nothing. Good Lord, no!" he said with a scornful laugh. "I wouldn't touch a thing they had to offer. You couldn't pay me to: I shouldn't sleep for a month if I did. But you, my boy!" he howled, turning suddenly upon me, "—are to have everything your heart desires! Everything, everything, everything!" He made an inclusive gesture with his long arms; then closed his eyes, stamped at the floor, and began to snuffle with laughter.

Mr. Brill had listened to all this with his great-jowled face slack-jawed and agape with astonishment. Now, he said, heavily: "He's goin' to have everything, is he? Where are you goin' to take him to git it?"

"Why, sir!" my uncle said in an annoyed tone, "I have told you all along—we are going to the modest but excellent establishment in the basement of this very building."

"Why, Reverend," Brill said in a protesting tone. "You ain't goin' to take your nephew *there*, are you? I thought you said you was goin' to git somethin' to *eat*."

"I had supposed," my uncle said with bitter sarcasm, "that one went there for that purpose. I had not supposed that one went there to get shaved."

"Well," said Brill, "if you go there you'll git shaved, all right. You'll not only git *shaved*, you'll git *skinned* alive. But you won't git anything to eat." And he hurled himself back again, roaring with laughter.

"Pay no attention to him!" my uncle said to me in a tone of bitter repugnance. "I have long known that his low and vulgar mind attempts to make a joke of everything, even the most sacred matters. I assure you, my boy, the place is excellent in every way:—do you suppose," he said now addressing Brill and all the others, with a howl of fury—"do you suppose, if it were not, that I should for a single moment *dream* of taking him there? Do you suppose that I would for an instant *contemplate* taking my own nephew, my sister's son, to any place in which I did not repose the fullest confidence? Not on your life!" he howled. "Not on your life!"

And we departed, followed by Brill's great bellow, and a farewell invitation which he shouted after me, "Don't worry, son! When you git through with that cockroach stew, come back an' I'll take you out to lunch with *me*!"



Although Brill delighted in teasing and baiting my uncle in this fashion, there was, at the bottom of his heart, a feeling of deep humility, of genuine respect and admiration for him: he respected Uncle Bascom's intelligence, he was secretly and profoundly impressed by the fact that my uncle had been a minister of the gospel and had preached in many churches.

Moreover, in the respect and awe with which Brill greeted these evidences of my uncle's superior education, in the eagerness he showed when he boasted to visitors, as he often did, of

my uncle's learning, there was a quality of pride that was profoundly touching and paternal: it was as if my uncle had been his son, and as if he wanted at every opportunity to display his talents to the world. And this, in fact, was exactly what he did want to do. Much to my uncle's annoyance, Brill was constantly speaking of his erudition to strangers who had come into the office for the first time, and constantly urging my uncle to perform for them, to "say some of them big words, Reverend." And even when my uncle answered him, as he frequently did, in terms of scorn, anger, and contempt, Brill was completely satisfied, if Uncle Bascom would only use a few of the "big words" in doing it. Thus, one day, when one of his boyhood friends, a New Hampshire man whom he had not seen in thirty-five years, had come in to renew their acquaintance Brill, in describing the accomplishments of my uncle, said with an air of solemn affirmation: "Why, hell yes, Jim! It'd take a college perffesser to know what the Reverend is talkin' about half the time! No ordinary — — — is able to understand him! So help me God, it's true!" he swore solemnly, as Jim looked incredulous. "The Reverend knows words the average man ain't never heard. He knows words that ain't even in the dictionary. Yes, sir!—an' uses 'em, too—all the time!" he concluded triumphantly.

"Why, my dear sir!" my uncle answered in a tone of exacerbated contempt, "What on earth are you talking about? Such a man as you describe would be a monstrosity, a heinous perversion of natural law! A man so wise that no one could understand him:—so literate that he could not communicate with his fellow creatures:—so erudite that he led the inarticulate and incoherent life of a beast or a savage!"—here Uncle Bascom squinted his eyes tightly shut, and laughed sneeringly down his nose: "Phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh!—Why, you con-sum-mate fool!" he sneered, "I have long known that your ignorance was bottomless—but I had never hoped to see it equalled—Nay! Surpassed!" he howled, "by your asininity."

"There you are!" said Brill exultantly to his visitor, "What did I tell you? There's one of them words, Jim: 'as-erninity,' why, damn it, the Reverend's

the only one who knows what that word means—you won't even find it in the dictionary!"

"Not find it in the dictionary!" my uncle yelled. "Almighty God, come down and give this ass a tongue as Thou didst once before in Balaam's time!"



Again, Brill was seated at his desk one day engaged with a client in those intimate, cautious, and confidential preliminaries that mark the consummation of a "deal" in real estate. On this occasion the prospective buyer was an Italian: the man sat awkwardly and nervously in a chair beside Brill's desk while the great man bent his huge weight ponderously and persuasively toward him. From time to time the Italian's voice, sullen, cautious, disparaging, interrupted Brill's ponderous and coaxing drone. The Italian sat stiffly, his thick, clumsy body awkwardly clad in his "good" clothes of heavy black, his thick, hairy, blunt-nailed hands cupped nervously upon his knees, his black eyes glittering with suspicion under his knitted inch of brow. At length, he shifted nervously, rubbed his paws tentatively across his knees and then, with a smile mixed of ingratiating and mistrust, said: "How mucha you want, eh?"

"How mucha we want?" Brill repeated vulgarly as the burble began to play about within his throat. "Why, how mucha you got? . . . You know we'll take every damn thing you got! It's not how mucha we want, it's how mucha you got!" And he hurled himself backward, bellowing with laughter. "By God, Reverend," he yelled as Uncle Bascom entered, "ain't that right? It's not how mucha we want, it's how mucha you got! 'od damn! We ought to take that as our motter. I've got a good mind to git it printed on our letterheads. What do you think, Reverend?"

"Hey?" howled Uncle Bascom absently, as he prepared to enter his own office.

"I say we ought to use it for our motter."

"Your *what*?" said Uncle Bascom scornfully, pausing as if he did not understand.

"Our motter," Brill said.

"Not your *motter*," my uncle howled derisively. "The word is *not* motter," he said contemptuously. "Nobody of any refinement would say *motter*. *Motter* is *not* correct!" he howled finally. "Only an ig-no-ram-us would say *motter*. No!" he yelled with final conclusiveness. "That is *not* the way to pronounce it! That is ab-so-lute-ly and em-phat-ic-ally *not* the way to pronounce it!"

"All right, then, Reverend," said Brill, submissively. "You're the doctor. What is the word?"

"The word is *motto*," Uncle Bascom snarled. "Of course! Any fool knows that!"

"Why, hell," Mr. Brill protested in a hurt tone. "That's what I said, ain't it?"

"No-o!" Uncle Bascom howled derisively. "No-o! By no means, by no means, by no means! You said *motter*. The word is *not* motter. The word is motto: m-o-t-t-o! M-O-T-T-O does *not* spell motter," he remarked with vicious decision.

"What does it spell?" said Mr. Brill.

"It spells *motto*," Uncle Bascom howled. "It *has* always spelled motto! It *will* always spell motto! As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: A-a-men!" he howled huskily in his most evangelical fashion. Then, immensely pleased at his wit, he closed his eyes, stamped at the floor and snarled and snuffled down his nose with laughter.

"Well, anyway," said Brill, "no matter how you spell it, it's not how mucha we want, it's how mucha you got! That's the way we feel about it!"

And this, in fact, without concealment, without pretense, without evasion, was just how Brill did feel about it. He wanted everything that was his and, in addition, he wanted as much as he could get. And this rapacity, this brutal and unadorned gluttony, so far from making men wary of him, attracted them to him, inspired them with unshakable confidence in his integrity, his business honesty. Perhaps the reason for this was that concealment did not abide in the man: he published his intentions to the world with an oath and a roar of laughter—and the world, having seen and judged, went away with the confidence of this Italian—that Brill was "one fine-a man!" Even my uncle, who had so often turned upon his col-

league the weapons of scorn, contempt, and mockery, had a curious respect for him, an acrid sunken affection: often, when we were alone, he would recall something Brill had said and his powerful and fluent features would suddenly be contorted in that familiar grimace, as he laughed his curious laugh which was forced out, with a deliberate and painful effort, through his powerful nose and his lips, barred with a few large teeth. "Phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh! . . . Of course!" he said, with a nasal rumination, as he stared over the apex of his great bony hands, clasped in meditation—"of course, he is just a poor ignorant fellow! I don't suppose—no, sir, I really do not suppose that Brill ever went to school over six months in his life!—say!" my uncle Bascom paused suddenly, turned to me abruptly with his strange fixed grin, and fastened his sharp old eyes keenly on me: in this sudden and abrupt change, this transference of his vision from his own secret and personal world, in which his thought and feeling was sunken, and which seemed to be so far away from the actual world about him, there was something impressive and disconcerting. His eyes were gray, sharp, and old, and one eyelid had a heavy droop or ptosis which, although it did not obscure his vision, gave his expression at times a sinister glint, a malevolent humor. "—Say!" here his voice sank to a deliberate and confiding whisper, "(Phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh!) Say—a man who would—he told me—O vile! vile! vile! my boy!" my uncle whispered, shutting his eyes in a kind of shuddering ecstasy as if at the memory of things too gloriously obscene to be repeated. "Can you *imagine*, can you even *dream* of such a state of affairs if he had possessed an atom, a *scintilla* of delicacy and good breeding! Yes, sir!" he said with decision. "I suppose there's no doubt about it! His beginnings were very lowly, very poor and humble, indeed! . . . Not that that is in any sense to his discredit!" Uncle Bascom said hastily, as if it had occurred to him that his words might bear some taint of snobbishness. "Oh, by no means, by no means, by no means!" he sang out, with a sweeping upward gesture of his long arm, as if he were clearing the air of wisps of smoke. "Some of our finest men—some of the

nation's *leaders*, have come from just such surroundings as those. Beyond a doubt! Beyond a doubt! There's no question about it whatever! Say!"—here he turned suddenly upon me again with the ptotic and sinister intelligence of his eye. "Was *Lincoln* an aristocrat? Was he the issue of wealthy parents? Was he brought up with a silver spoon in his mouth? Was our *own* former governor, the Vice-President of the United States to-day, reared in the lap of luxury! Not on your life!" howled Uncle Bascom. "He came from frugal and thrifty Vermont farming stock, he has never deviated a *jot* from his early training, he remains to-day what he has always been—one of the simplest of men! Finest people on earth, no question about it whatever!"



Again, he meditated gravely with lost stare across the apex of his great joined hands, and I noticed again, as I had noticed so often, the great dignity of his head in thought—a head that was highbrowed, lean and lonely, a head that not only in its cast of thought but even in its physical contour, and in its profound and lonely earnestness, bore an astonishing resemblance to that of Emerson—it was, at times, like these, as grand a head as I had ever seen, and on it was legible the history of man's loneliness, his dignity, his grandeur and despair.

"Yes, sir!" he said, in a moment. "He is, of course, a vulgar fellow and some of the things he says at times are O! vile! vile! vile!" my uncle cried, closing his eyes and laughing. "O vile! *most* vile! . . . but (phuh! phuh! phuh!) you can't help laughing at the fellow at times because he is so . . . O, I could tell you things, my boy! . . . O *Vile! vile!*" he cried, shaking his head downwards. "What coarseness! . . . What *in-vec-tive!*" he whispered, in a kind of ecstasy.

And this invective, I know, he cherished in his secret heart so dearly that on at least one notable occasion he had invoked it, and lamented that he did not have it by him as an aid. What Uncle Bascom had said on that occasion, lifting his arms to heaven, and crying out a confession of his own inadequacy in a tone of passionate supplication, was: "O, that J. T. were here

at this moment!—or that I had his tongue!—that he might aid me with his *scathing* invective!"

The occasion was this: a few years before my uncle had taken his wife to Florida for the winter, and had rented there a cottage. The place he chose was small and modest, it was several miles away from one of the larger and more fashionable towns, it was not on the coast, but set a few miles inland, and it had the advantages of a river, or peninsular inlet which rose and fell with the recurrence of the tides. This modest winter colony was so small that it could afford only one small church and one minister, himself a member of the colony. During the winter this man was taken ill: he was unable to continue his services at the church, and his little following, in looking around for a substitute, learned that Uncle Bascom had formerly been a minister. They came to him, therefore, and asked if he would serve.

"Oh, *Lord*, no!" Bascom howled derisively. "Good *heavens*, no! I shouldn't *dream* of such a thing! I shouldn't for a moment *contemplate* such a thing! I am a *total*—for twenty years I have been a *complete*—agnostic."

The flock looked at him with a dazed expression. "Wal," said one of the leading parishioners, a lean Down-Easter, "most of us here are Presbyterians, but I don't know that that would make any difference. The way I see it, we're all met here to worship the Lord, and we need a preacher no matter what his denomination is. When all's said and done," he concluded comfortably, "I don't guess there's much difference between any of us in the long run."

"Why, my dear sir!" my uncle said, with a slight sneer. "If you think there is no difference between an agnostic and a Presbyterian you had better have your head examined by a doctor without further delay. No-o!" he howled faintly. "I cannot profess belief in what I do not know! I cannot simulate conviction when I have none! I cannot preach a faith I have not got! There, sir, you have my whole position in a nut-shell!"

Here, people in the group began to stir restlessly, to mutter uneasily, and to draw away: suddenly Uncle Bascom caught the muttered word "atheist."

"No-o!" he shouted, his ptotic eye beginning to glitter with the light of com-

bat. "By no means! By no means! You only show your ignorance when you say a thing like that. They are not the same! They are ab-so-lute-ly and emphat-i-cal-ly *not* the same! An atheist is *not* an agnostic and an agnostic is *not* an atheist! Why!" he yelled, "the mere sound of the words would teach you that if you had an atom of intelligence. An atheist is a man who does not believe in God!—it is composed of the Greek prefix 'a'—meaning *not*, and the noun 'the-os,' meaning God: an atheist therefore says there is no God! Now," he continued, licking his lips for joy, "we come to the word *agnostic*. Is the sound the same? No-o! Is the meaning the same? By no means! Are the parts the same? Not on your life! The word is *agnostic*: a-g-n-o-s-t-i-c! From what language is it derived? From Greek, of course—as any fool should know! From what words? From the vowel of negation 'a' again, and from 'gnostikos'—the word for *knowing*. An agnostic therefore is what?" he demanded, glaring around at their mute faces. "Why!" he said impatiently, as no one answered, "Any schoolboy knows that much! A not-knowing man! A man who does not know! Not a man who denies! Oh, by no means!"—his great hand rose impatiently—"An *atheist* is a man who denies! An *agnostic* is simply a man who does not know!"

"I can't see there's any difference," some one muttered. "They *both* sound like a couple of godless heathen to me!"

"No difference!" Bascom howled. "My dear sir, hold your tongue before you bring down lasting shame upon your progeny! . . . They are as different as night from day, as black from white, as the sneering irreverence of the cynic from the calm, temperate, and judicial spirit of the philosopher! Why!" he declared impressively, "Some of the finest spirits of our times have been agnostics. Yes, sir! Some of the grandest people that ever lived! . . . The great Matthew Arnold was an agnostic!" he yelled. "Does that sound as if there was no difference? Not on your life!"

He paused, and as there was no response from his involuntary congregation, he began, after a moment, to fumble at the inside pocket of his coat with his big fingers.

"I have here a poem," he said, taking

it out of his pocket, "of my own composition"—here he coughed modestly—"although it may show traces, I admit, of the influence of the great man whose name I have just mentioned, and whom I am proud to call my master: Matthew Arnold. It will, I believe, illustrate my position better than anything I could say to you." He held up his great forefinger to command attention, and then began to read.

"The title of the poem," Uncle Bascom said, "is—'My Creed.'" After a short silence, he began:

"Is there a land beyond the stars
Where we may find eternal day,
Life after death, peace after wars?
Is there? I can not say.

Shall we find there a happier life,
All joy that here we never know,
Love in all things, an end of strife?
Perhaps: it may be so."

There were seventeen other stanzas which Uncle Bascom read to them deliberately and with telling enunciation, after which he folded the paper and looked about him with a sneer: "I think," he said, "that I have made my meaning clear. Now you know what an agnostic is."



They did. His meaning was so clear that they had no language to oppose to it: they turned, they went away like men who had been stunned. Among them, however, was one who did not yield so easily, a daughter of the Lord who had often won by persuasion and the soft violence of her beaming eye what others failed to win by harsher means. This lady was a widow, a Southern woman in her middle years: her charms were ripe, she had a gentle, loving touch, a soft and fruity unction in her voice. This lady had been able to resist few ministers and few ministers had been able to resist this lady. Now, as the others retreated, the lady advanced: she came forward with a practised sidling movement of her hips and Uncle Bascom, who was standing triumphantly in the midst of a receding host, suddenly found himself confronted by her gentle and importunate face.

"Oh, Mr. Hawke!" she crooned sweetly, with a kind of abdominal rap-

ture in her voice (thus, the way she pronounced his name was—Mis-tah Haw-uk!). "I *jus'* know that you must've been a *won-da-ful* preach-ah! I can tell by yo' face that you'ah such a *g-o-o-d* man—" Again she grunted sweetly with this ecstatic abdominal expiration.

"Why, madame! Why—" Uncle Bascom began, decidedly in a confused tone, but taking her abundance in with a sharp appraising eye.

"I was *jus'* thrilled to death all the time that you was tawkin', Mistah Haw-uk," the widow said. "I was a-sittin' theah an' sittin' theah, just a-drinkin' it all in, just a-bashin' in the rays of yo' wisdom, Mistah Haw-uk! All the time you was readin' that wonderful poem, I was just a-sayin' to myse'f: What a wonderful thing it is that a man like this has been chosen fo' the Suvvice of the Lawd, what a wonderful thing it is to know that this man is one o' Gawd's Suvvants!"

"Why, madame!" Bascom cried, his gaunt face flushed with pleasure. "Why, madame, I assure you I am deeply grateful . . . deeply honored to think that a lady of your obvious . . . your *undoubted* intelligence . . . should feel that way about me! But, madame!—"

"Oh, Mistah Haw-uk!" the widow groaned. "I *jus' love* to heah you *tawk*! I *jus' love* the way you handle langwidge! You heah so much po' shoddy, good-fo'-nothin' tawk nowadays—all full o' slang an' bad grammah an' I don't know whatall: I don't know what fokes ah *comin'* to—it's a real pleasuah—yes, suh! a real sho' nuff *treat*—to heah a man who can express himse'f the way you can. The minute I saw you I said to myse'f: I *jus' know* that that man can *tawk*! I *know* it! I *know* it! I *know* it!" The widow cried, shaking her head from side to side vigorously. "Theah's a man, I said," the widow continued, "theah's a man who kin do anything he likes with me—yes, suh! just anything!—I said that just as soon as you opened yo' mouf to speak!"

"Oh, madame, madame!" cried Bascom fervently, bowing with real dignity. "I thank you. I thank you sincerely and gratefully from the bottom of my heart!"

"Yes, suh! I could just enjoy myse'f—(I said)—just a-lookin' at his haid."

"At my what?" yelled Bascom, jump-

ing as if he had received an electric shock.

"At yo' *haid*," the widow answered.

"Oh!" howled Bascom. "At my *head*! My *head*!"—and he began to laugh foolishly.

"Yes, suh, Mistah Haw-uk," the widow continued. "I jus' thought you had the *grandest* haid I evah saw. The moment you began to read that poem I said, 'Only a man with a haid like that could a-written that poem. O thank Gawd! (I said) that he has dedicated his wondaful *haid* to the Lawd's Wuk!'"

"Why, madame," Bascom cried again. "You have paid me the greatest honor! I cannot sufficiently thank you! But I am afraid—in *justice*, in *fairness*, I must admit," he said with some difficulty, "that you may not have entirely understood—that you are not quite clear—that, perhaps I did not make the meaning, the general purpose of that poem—O! it's my own fault, I know! Beyond a doubt! Beyond a doubt!—but perhaps I did not make its meaning wholly plain!"

"Yes, you did!" the widow protested. "Every word of it was jus' as plain as day to me! I kep' sayin' to myse'f: That's *jus'* the way I've always felt, but I nevah could express myse'f befo': I nevah *met* any one befo' that I could tawk to about it. An' now (I said), this wondaful man comes along an' puts the whole thing straight in my haid! O! (I said) if I could just sit at his feet, an' *listen* all day long, if I could jus' sit an' drink in all he had to say, if I could just *listen* to him tawk—I'd nevah ask fo' anything bettah!"

"Why, madame!" Bascom cried, deeply, genuinely moved. "I assure you I'd like nothing better! Yes, indeed! I assure you I'd be delighted! O, at any time! At any time!" he howled. "It is rare that one meets to-day—O, *most* rare!—a woman of your intelligence and perspicacity! We *must* have another talk!" he said. "Oh, by all means, by all means!"

"Uh-huh!" the widow grunted sweetly.

Bascom looked around craftily to see if my Aunt Louise was anywhere within sight or hearing. "Perhaps," he said, smacking his lips together, "we might meet and have a quiet walk together. Nothing is more conducive to contemplation than the tranquil peace of nature. There's no question about it."

"Uh-huh," the widow said.

"To-morrow," Bascom whispered.

"Uh-huh," the widow crooned viscerally.

Thus, there began between Uncle Bascom and the widow a series of promenades, in which he expounded his views liberally, and in which she was able, by the harmonious adjustment of her nature, to find herself in complete agreement. Again and again, my Aunt Louise watched them depart, she peered after them through her bright mad eyes, snuffling with angry laughter, and muttering, as she had muttered many times before: "The old *fool*! . . . The *misable* old *skinflint*! . . . Too poor to buy his own wife a *dwess* . . . while he spends *faw-chuns*, *faw-chuns* on them! . . . It's in the blood . . . the blood!" she whispered hoarsely. "They're *mad* . . . *mad*! His family's *ovah-sexed*, all of them!"



One evening, as Bascom and the widow were returning from one of these walks, they found themselves toward sunset a mile or so from town. It was a desolate spot: their road wound on through fringes of scrub pine and stunted palm along the edges of the inlet: the tide was out, the water lay in shallow puddles across the bed of viscous mud, a few birds wheeled with creaking eery cries above this loneliness of earth and water, and there was the smell of shelled waste, sea-scum—the potent, magical, and exultant smell of the sea in harbors. The air and the sky were sweet with incomparable clarity, with an immense delicacy of light, and the sun, which now burned like a vast orange-colored ball, without violence or heat, was resting against the lonely and desolate space of the western horizon. The widow and Bascom paused for a moment to watch this scene, and then she said triumphantly: "Now, Mistah Haw-uk, you know that *Somebody* must've *done* all that. You know it jus' didn't go an' happen by itse'f. You know, when you see a beautiful sunset like that that nobody but Gawd himse'f could've made it. Now, you know you do, Mistah Haw-uk!"

"The question of its beauty," said my uncle precisely, "is debatable. The philosopher Hegel, for example, so far from seeing beauty in a sunset, remarked that it looked to him as if the sky

had small-pox!" Here Bascom closed his eyes, and snuffled with laughter.

"Oh, Mistah Haw-uk!" the widow said reproachfully. "I know *you* don't feel that way about it. A man with a *haid* like yoah's could nevah believe a thing like that!"

"Oh!" Bascom shouted, immensely tickled for some reason. "By no means! By no means!" And he stamped violently at the earth, blind with his strange forced snarl of laughter.

For a moment they were silent: a vast and exuberant elation, an exultant vitality, was alive in Uncle Bascom. He looked at the shallow waters, he looked at the setting sun, he looked at the widow, and when he tried to speak, exultant mirth possessed him, and he could not.

"Shall we?—" he began at length inquiringly, but here a whimsy of humor seized him, he stopped short, contorted his face, stamped at the earth ecstatically, and snuffled down his nose—"shall we go in *wa-ding*?" There was a deliberate, a luscious nasality in his precise enunciation of the last word.

"Oh, Mistah Haw-uk! Why-y!" the widow exclaimed fruitily. "Wading! For what?"

"For . . . oysters!" said Uncle Bascom lusciously and gently.

"For . . . oysters!" the widow cried. "But I didn't know there were any oysters!"

Bascom pondered this statement for a moment, and the more he considered it, the funnier it became to him. He bit his rubbery lip, closed his eyes, and began to snuffle down his nose with laughter. "O yes!" he howled. "O my yes! There are always . . . oysters! There are plenty of . . . oysters!"

So the widow, without much more than a half-hearted and decorous protest, and a cautious glance around to make sure that pine and palm gave shelter to no watchers, sat down beside my uncle and took off her shoes and stockings. Then, hand in hand, they advanced across the shallows and through water that rarely came above their knees, the widow tentatively, with a balancing movement and little abdominal cries of alarm, Uncle Bascom more boldly, and with confident assurances: "My dear girl!" he said, grasping her hand more tightly. "You are in no danger whatsoever! Oh, not the *slightest*!" he yelled. "You are as safe as you

would be in your mother's arms. Yes, sir! You may rest assured on that score! There's no question of it!"

The widow held her skirts kilted up and knotted in one hand, midway along her milky thighs, while Uncle Bascom had rolled his trousers high above his bony knees and stringy calves, which now advanced through the shallow water with a storky and tentative step. At length, about the middle of the stream, they reached a bar of hard-packed sand, and here they stood for a while looking at the setting sun, pacing along their little beach, so absorbed in their contemplation of coming dark, of solitude, and of themselves that neither noticed that the tide was coming in.

And yet the tide came in. It came steadily, urgently, imperceptibly, feathering against the fringes of the inlet, advancing, retreating, advancing, retreating, but advancing always past its last retreat until suddenly Bascom felt the shock of water at his toes: he looked down and saw that their ledge of earth and safety was shrinking almost visibly below his glance: he yelled, first from alarm, and then for help: he shouted, but no one came; he seized the buxom widow and, by staggering effort lifted her, he tottered with her into the water. At the first step the water reached his knees, at the second, halfway up his shanks, at the third, he yelled, and dropped his cargo. She screamed, as a swirl of water caught her at the waist: she clutched him, she clung to him, she screamed, and suddenly Bascom began to curse. He shook a knotted fist at the imperturbable evening skies, he blasphemed against a deity in which he had no faith, and when a false step plunged him to his chin in water, he howled retraction of his blasphemy and begged for providential help. Neither could swim; perhaps neither was in the greatest danger, but both were terrified and shocked, the water wet their ears before they reached the shore, and when at length they tottered up on dry land again, the widow had reached the end and limit of her effort: for several moments she lay panting hoarsely, half out of water and half in, a battered half-emergent Phryne. As for Bascom, he stood on palsied limbs and with a chattering jaw for several moments: his long arms, his bony hands, his stooped shoulders, his stringy legs all bent in a common, constant drip—he was abso-

lutely speechless, and stood there for some time chattering with fright, and dripping water. At length, the widow raised a portion of her charms, bedraggled but made undeniable by water, and moaned hoarsely, "Oh, Mistah Haw-uk! Mistah Haw-uk! Come an' git me, Mistah Haw-uk!"

At this moment Uncle Bascom's features were seized by a horrible convulsion, he opened his mouth to speak, but no words came, he raised two trembling fists toward heaven, but no words came. He tried to curse, but no words came. At length he mastered himself sufficiently to speak and, as if finding his own artillery too feeble for the occasion, he uttered slowly, with passionate conviction, the supplication already mentioned: "O that J. T. were here—that he might aid me with his *scathing* invective!"

So ended romance between Uncle Bascom and the widow.



That year I was twenty, it had been my first year in New England, and the winter had seemed very long. In the man-swarm I felt alone and lost, a desolate atom in the streets of life. That year I went to see my uncle many times.

Sometimes I would find him in his dusty little cubicle, bent over the intricacy of a legal form, painfully and carefully, with compressed lips, filling in the blank spaces with his stiff angular and laborious hand. He would speak quietly, without looking up, as I came in: "Hello, my boy. Sit down, won't you? I'll be with you in a moment." And for a time the silence would be broken only by the heavy rumble of Brill's voice outside, by the minute scratching of my uncle's pen, and by the immense and murmurous sound of time, which rose above the city, which caught up in the upper air all of the city's million noises, and yet which seemed remote, essential, imperturbable and ever-lasting—fixed and unchanging, no matter what men lived or died.

Again, I would find him staring straight before him, with his great hands folded in a bony arch, his powerful gaunt face composed in a rapt tranquillity of thought. At these times he seemed to have escaped from every particular and degrading thing in life—

from the excess of absurd and eccentric speech and gesture, from all demeaning parsimonies, from niggling irascibilities, from everything that contorted his face and spirit away from its calmness and unity of thought. His face at such a time might well have been the mask of Thought, the visage of contemplation. Sometimes he would not speak for several minutes, his mind seemed to brood upon the lip and edge of time, to be remote from every dusty moment of the earth.

One day I went there and found him thus; after a few moments he lowered his great hands and, without turning toward me, sat for some time in an attitude of quiet relaxation. At length he said:

"What is man that thou art mindful of him?"

It was one of the first days of spring: the spring had come late, with a magical northern suddenness. It seemed to have burst out of the earth overnight, the air was lyrical and sang with it.

Spring came that year like a triumph and like a prophecy—it sang and shifted like a moth of light before me, but I was sure that it would bring me a glory and fulfilment I had never known.

My hunger and thirst had been immense: I was caught up for the first time in the midst of the Faustian web—there was no food that could feed me, no drink that could quench my thirst—like an insatiate and maddened animal I roamed the streets, trying to draw up mercy from the cobblestones, solace and wisdom from a million sights and faces, or prowled through endless shelves of high-piled books tortured by everything I could not see and could not know, and growing blind, weary, and desperate from what I read and saw. I wanted to know all, have all, be all—to be one and many, to have the whole riddle of this vast and swarming earth as legible, as tangible in my hand as a coin of minted gold.

Suddenly spring came, and I felt at once exultant certainty and joy. Outside my uncle's dirty window I could see the edge of Faneuil Hall, and hear the swarming and abundant activity of the markets. The deep roar of the markets came to us across the singing and lyrical air, and I drank into my lungs a thousand proud, potent, and mysterious odors which came to me like the breath of certainty, like the proof of

magic, and like the revelation that all confusion had been banished—the world that I longed for won, the word that I sought for spoken, the hunger that devoured me fed and ended. And the markets, swarming with richness, joy, and abundance, thronged below me like a living evidence of fulfilment. For it seemed to me that nowhere more than here was the passionate enigma of New England felt: New England, with its harsh and stony soil, and its tragic and lonely beauty; its desolate rocky coasts and its swarming fisheries, the white, piled, frozen harshness of its winters with the magnificent jewelry of stars, the dark firwoods, and the warm little white houses at which it is impossible to look without thinking of groaning bins, hung bacon, hard cider, succulent bastings and love's warm, white, and opulent flesh.

There was the rustle of gingham by day and sober glances; then, under low eaves and starlight, the stir of the satiny thighs in feather beds, the white small bite and tigerish clasp of secret women—always the buried heart, the sunken passion, the frozen heat. And then, after the long, unendurably hard-locked harshness of the frozen winter, the coming of spring as now, like a lyrical cry, like a flicker of rain across a window glass, like the sudden and delicate noises of a spinet—the coming of spring and ecstasy, and overnight the thrum of wings, the burst of the tender buds, the ripple and dance of the roughened water, the light of flowers, the sudden, fleeting, almost captured, and exultant spring.

And here, within eighty yards of the dusty little room where my uncle Bascom had his desk, there was living evidence that this intuition was not false: the secret people, it was evident, did not subsist alone on codfish and a jug full of baked beans—they ate meat, and large chunks of it, for all day long, within the market district, the drivers of big wagons were standing to their chins in meat, boys dragged great baskets of raw meat along the pavements, red-faced butchers, aproned with gouts of blood, and wearing the battered straw hats that butchers wear, toiled through the streets below great loads of loin or haunch or rib and in chill shops with sawdust floors the beeves were hung in frozen regimental rows.

Right and left, around the central

market, the old buildings stretched down to the harbor and the smell of ships: this was built-on land, in old days ships were anchored where these cobbles were, but the warehouses were also old—they had the musty, mellow, blackened air and smell of the Seventies, they looked like the Victorian prints, they reeked of ancient ledgers, of "counting houses," of proud monied merchants, and the soft-spoked rumble of victorias.

By day, this district was one snarled web of chaos: a *gewirr* of deep-bodied trucks, powerful dappled horses, cursing drivers, of loading, unloading, and shipping, of dispatch and order, of the million complicated weavings of life and business.

But if one came here at evening, after the work of the day was done, if one came here at evening on one of those delicate and sudden days of spring that New England knows, if one came here as many a lonely youth had come here in the past, some boy from the inland immensity of America, some homesick lad from the South, from the marvellous hills of Old Catawba, he might be pierced again by the bitter ecstasy of youth, the ecstasy that tears him apart with a cry that has no tongue, the ecstasy that is proud, lonely, and exultant, that is fierce with joy and blind with glory, but that yet carries in it a knowledge that is born in such a moment that the intangible cannot be touched, the ungraspable cannot be grasped—the imperial and magnificent minute is gone forever which, with all its promises, its million intuitions, he wishes to clothe with the living substance of beauty. He wishes to flesh the moment with the thighs and breast and belly of a wonderful mistress, he wishes to be great and glorious and triumphant, to distill the ether of this ecstasy in a liquor, and to drink strong joy forever; and at the heart of all this is the bitter knowledge of death—death of the moment, death of the day, death of one more infrequent spring.

Perhaps the thing that really makes New England wonderful is this sense of joy, this intuition of brooding and magic fulfilment that hovers like a delicate presence in the air of one of these days. Perhaps the answer is simple: perhaps it is only that this soft and sudden spring, with its darts and flicks of evanescent joy, its sprite-like presence

that is only half-believed, its sound that is the sound of something lost and elfin, and half-dreamed, half-heard, seems wonderful after the grim frozen tenacity of the winter, the beautiful and terrible desolation, the assault of the frost and ice on living flesh which resists it finally as it would resist the cruel battering of a brute antagonist, so that the tart, stingy speech, the tight gestures, the withdrawn and suspicious air, the thin lips, red pointed noses and hard prying eyes of these people are really the actions of people who, having to defend themselves harshly against nature, harshly defend themselves against all the world.



At any rate, the thing the boy feels who comes here at the day's end is not completion, weariness, and sterility, but a sense of swelling ecstasy, a note of brooding fulfilment. The air will have in it the wonderful odors of the market and the smell of the sea: as he walks over the bare cobbled pavement under the corrugated tin awnings of the warehouses and produce stores a hundred smells of the rich fecundity of the earth will assail him: the clean sharp pungency of thin crated wood and the citric nostalgia of oranges, lemons and grapefruit, the stench of a decayed cabbage and the mashed pulp of a rotten orange. There will be also the warm coarse limey smell of chickens, the strong coddy smell of cold fish and oysters; and the crisp moist cleanliness of the garden smells—of great lettuces, cabbages, new potatoes, with their delicate skins loamy with sweet earth, the wonderful sweet crispness of crated celery; and then the melons—the ripe golden melons bedded in fragrant straw—and all the warm infusions of the tropics: the bananas, the pineapples and the alligator pears.

The delicate and subtle air of spring touches all these odors with a new and delicious vitality; it draws the tar out of the pavements also, and it draws slowly, subtly, from ancient warehouses, the compacted perfumes of eighty years: the sweet thin piney scents of packing boxes, the glutinous composts of half a century, that have thickly stained old warehouse plankings, the smells of twine, tar, turpentine and hemp, and of thick molasses, ginseng, pungent vines

and roots and old piled sacking; the clean ground strength of fresh coffee, brown, sultry, pungent, and exultantly fresh and clean; the smell of oats, baled hay and bran, of crated eggs and cheese and butter; and particularly the smell of meat, of frozen beeves, slick porks and veals, of brains and livers and kidneys, of haunch, paunch and jowl; of meat that is raw and of meat that is cooked, for upstairs in that richly dingy block of buildings there is a room where the butchers, side by side with the bakers, the bankers, the brokers and the Harvard boys, devour thick steaks of the best and tenderest meat, smoking hot breads, and big jacketed potatoes.

And then there is always the sea. In dingy blocks, memoried with time and money, the buildings stretch down to the docks, and there is always the feeling that the sea was here, that this is built-on earth. A single truck will rattle over the deserted stones, and then there is the street that runs along the harbor, the dingy little clothing shops and eating places, the powerful strings of freight cars, agape and empty, odorous with their warm fatigued planking, and the smells of flanges and axles that have rolled great distances.

And finally, by the edges of the water, there are great piers and storehouses, calm and potent with their finished work: they lie there, immense, starkly ugly, yet touched with the powerful beauty of enormous works and movements; they are what they are, they have been built without a flourish for the work they do, their great sides rise in level cliffs of brick, they are pierced with tracks and can engulf great trains; and now that the day is done they breathe with the vitality of a tired but living creature. A single foot-fall will make remote and lonely echoes in their brooding depths, there will be the expiring clatter of a single truck, the sound of a worker's voice as he says "Good-night," and then the potent and magical silence.

And then there is the sea—the sea, beautiful and mysterious as it is only when it meets the earth in harbors, the sea that bears in swell and glut of tides the odorous savor of the earth, the sea that swings and slaps against encrusted piles, the sea that is braided with long ropes of scummy weed, the sea that brings the mast and marly scent of shelled decay. There is the sea, and

there are the great ships—the freighters, the fishing schooners, the clean white one-night boats that make the New York run, now also potent and silent, a glitter of bright lights, of gleaming brasses, of opulent saloons—a token of joy and splendor in dark waters, a hint of love and the velvet belly upon dark tides—and the sight of all these things, the fusion of all these odors by the sprite of May is freighted with unspeakable memories, with unutterable intuitions for the youth: he does not know what he could utter, but glory, love, power, wealth, flight and movement and the sight of new earth in the morning, and the living corporeal fulfilment of all his ecstasy is in his wish and his conviction.

Certainly, these things can be found in New England, but perhaps the person who finds this buried joy the most is this lonely visitor—and particularly the boy from the South, for in the heart of the Southerner alone, perhaps, is this true and secret knowledge of the North: it is there in his dreams and his childhood premonition, it is there like the dark Helen, and no matter what he sees to cheat it, he will always believe in it, he will always return to it. Certainly, this was true of the gnarled and miserly old man who now sat not far from all this glory in his dingy State Street office, for my uncle Bascom Hawke, although the stranger on seeing him might have said, "There goes the very image of a hard-bitten old Down-Easter," had come, as lonely and wretched a youth as ever lived, from the earth of Old Catawba, he had known and felt these things and, in spite of his frequent bitter attacks on the people, the climate, the life, New England was the place to which he had returned to live, and for which he felt the most affection.



—"What is man that thou art *mindful* of him?"—he said again, this time with that tell-tale pedantry of emphasis which foretold a seizure of his mouth—ing eccentricity. "What is *man* that thou art *mindful* of him?" he repeated with yet more emphasis. The word is *mindful*, *mindful*, *mindful*!—he made the word whine like the rasp of a saw. "M-I-N-D-F-U-L! (Phuh! phuh! phuh! phuh, phuh!)"

And again, his visage of calm and

powerful thought was twisted by the disfiguring grimace, the inept and reasonless laughter. In a moment more, his face grew calm again, magnificently composed above his arched, gnarled hands; he spoke with eloquent deliberation. He became triumphant reasoning mind: he talked with superb and balanced judgment. And as the strange and lonely spirit of thought transformed his face, all the tumult and madness of his life was forgotten: no question of money or of self was involved.

"Beyond a doubt! Beyond a doubt!" he said deliberately. "The quality of the best writing in the books of the Old and New Testaments may take rank with the best writing that was ever done, but the amount of great writing is less than it is commonly supposed to be. There are passages—nay! *books!*"—his voice rising strangely to a husky howl—"of the vilest rubbish."

He paused a moment; then, in a remote voice—in the remote and passionate voice that had had such power to thrill men when it uttered poetry—he continued: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last—the triumphant music of one of the mightiest of earth's poets, the sublime utterance of a man for whom God had opened the mysteries of heaven and hell, one of the mightiest lines, my dear boy, the most magnificent poetry that was ever written." And suddenly Bascom threw his gaunt hands before his face, and wept in strong, hoarse sobs: "Oh, my God! My God!—The beauty, the pity of it all! . . . You must excuse me," he whispered huskily after a moment, drawing his frayed and faded sleeve across his eyes. "You must excuse me. . . . It brought back . . . memories."

In spite of this ridiculous exhibition, and the absurd quality of these final words, there was something terrible and revolting about it, too: I was only twenty, and I shrank back for a moment and felt ashamed. In a moment more, however, Uncle Bascom was completely at his ease again: he acted as if nothing unusual had happened, and as if he had completely forgotten his outburst of a moment before.

After a pause, without looking at me, he said quietly, but with an unmistakable note of bitterness in his voice: "Have you seen any of my . . . children, recently?"

The question surprised me, because he rarely asked about them: most of the time he seemed to have forgotten their existence, to be wholly indifferent to them. I told him that I had seen one of his daughters the week before.

"My children—*basely* and *damnably*, *basely* and *damnably*, have deserted me!" he said with bitter passion. Then, quietly, indifferently, as if stating the fact more truthfully and temperately, he said: "I never see any of them any more. They never come to my house and I never go to theirs. I do not care. No, sir, I do not care. It makes no difference to me. O, not the slightest! None whatever!" and he dismissed it with his big-boned hand. In a moment he added: "Their *mother* visits them, I believe. . . . Their *mother* goes, of course, whenever she gets invited."—Here again, the note of bitterness and scorn was evident, as if he held his wife guilty of some treachery in visiting her own children; but indifference and contempt were also in his voice—he spoke of his wife and children as if they were all strangers to him, as if their lives touched only remotely the edges of the buried world—the world in which he lived and moved, in which his soul wrought out its fated destiny.

And this was true: like all of his family he had passed through a dozen lives in living his own, he was done with his children and done with his wife, he had forgotten them, he was indifferent to them, he did not need them. But they, two daughters and two sons, the youngest of whom was over thirty, the oldest more than forty, were neither able to forget him nor forgive him. He lived in their bitter memory; like men who are searching the causes for some fatal catastrophic flaw which has broken the back of a mighty bridge they went back through the painful annals of their childhood, the years of frustration and bitterness they had lived beneath his roof, the years they could not forget, escape, or deny. His shadow fell across them: they never saw him, and they always talked of him, aping his speech, his gesture, and his manner, mocking him with limber tongues, but living in his life again and secretly feeling the old fear, the old awe, because his life alone had done what it had wished to do—warped and twisted though it may have been, it had held the rails, it had kept its way, it had seen new lands.

For them, it sometimes seemed, the years were passing like a bitter water on the wheel of life: the wheel turned and they got older.

And now, as if he, too, had seen them as he spoke of them, he said: "They can all look after themselves. Every one must look after himself—say!" he paused suddenly, tapping his great finger on my knee, with the enquiring and combative glitter of his eye. "Does any one *help* you to die? Does any one go down into the grave with you? Can you *do* anything for any one? No!" he said decisively, and in a moment he added, slowly and deliberately: "Is not my help in *me*?"



Then, ruminant and lost, he stared across the archway of his hands. In a moment, with what was only an apparent irrelevance, with what was really a part of the coherent past, a light plucked from dark adyts of the brain, he said: "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"

He was silent and thoughtful for a moment; then he added sadly: "I am an old man. I have lived a long time. I have seen so many things. Sometimes everything seems so long ago."

Then his eye went back into the wilderness, the lost earth, the buried men.

Presently he said, "I hope you will come out on Sunday. O, by all means! By all means! I believe your aunt is expecting you. Yes, sir, I believe she said something to that effect. Or perhaps she intends to pay a visit to one of her children. I do not know, I have not the *remotest*—not the *faintest* idea of what she proposes to do," he howled. "Of course," he said impatiently and scornfully, "I never have any notion what she has in mind. No, sir, I really could not tell you. I no longer pay any attention to what she says—O! not the slightest!" he waved his great hand through the air—"Say!" stiffly and harshly he tapped my knee, grinning at me with the combative glitter of his ptotic eye—"Say! did you ever find *one* of them with whom it was possible to carry on a coherent conversation? Did you ever find one of them who would respond to the processes of rea-

son and ordered thought? My dear boy!" he cried, "You cannot talk to them. I assure you you cannot talk to them. You might as well whistle into the wind or spit into the waters of the Nile for all the good it will do you. In his youth man will bare the riches of his spirit to them, will exhaust the rich accumulations of his genius—his wisdom, his learning, his philosophy—in an effort to make them worthy of his companionship—and in the end, what does he *always* find? Why," said Uncle Bascom bitterly, "that he has spent his powers in talking to an imbecile"—and he snarled vengefully through his nose. In a moment more, he contorted his face, and nasally whined in a grotesque and mincing parody of a woman's voice, "O, I feel *so* sick! O, deary *me*, now! I think my *time* is coming on again! O, you don't *love* me any mo-o-ore! O, I *wish* I was dead! O, I can't get *up* to-day! O, I wish you'd bring me something *nice* from *ta-own*! O, if you loved me you'd buy me a *new* hat! O, I've got nothing to *we-e-ar*!" here his voice had an added snarl of bitterness—"I'm ashamed to go out on the street with all the other *wim-men*!"

Then he paused broodingly for a moment more, wheeled abruptly and tapped me on the knee again: "The proper study of mankind is—say!" he said with a horrible fixed grimace and in a kind of cunning whisper—"Does the poet say—*woman*? I want to ask you: *does* he, now? Not on your life!" yelled Uncle Bascom. "The word is *man*, *man*, *man*! Nothing else but *man*!"

Again he was silent: then, with an accent of heavy sarcasm, he went on: "Your aunt likes music. You may have observed your aunt is fond of music—"

It was, in fact, the solace of her life: on a tiny gramophone which one of her daughters had given her, she played constantly the records of the great composers, particularly of Wagner, lost in the enchanted forests of the music, her spirit wandering drunkenly down vast murky aisles of sound, through which the great hoarse throats of horns were baying faintly. And occasionally, on Sundays, on one of her infrequent excursions into the world, when her daughters bought her tickets for concerts at Symphony Hall—that great gray room lined on its sides with pallid plaster shells of Greece—she would sit

perched high, a sparrow held by the hypnotic serpent's eye of music—following each motif, hearing minutely each subtle entry of the mellow flutes, the horns, the spinal ecstasy of violins—until her lonely and desolate life was spun out of her into aerial fabrics of bright sound.

“—Your aunt is fond of music,” Bascom said deliberately. “Perhaps you may have thought—perhaps it seemed to you that she discovered it—perhaps you thought it was your aunt's own patent and invention—but there you would be wrong! O yes! my boy!” he howled remotely. “You may have thought so, but you would be wrong—Say!” he turned slowly with a malevolent glint of interrogation, a controlled ironic power—“was the Fifth Symphony written by a woman? Was the object of your aunt's worship, Richard Wagner, a *female*?” he snarled. “By no means! Where are their great works—their mighty symphonies, their great paintings, their epic poetry? Was it in a woman's skull that the Critique of Pure Reason was conceived? Is the gigantic work upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel the product of a woman's genius?—Say! Did you ever hear of a lady by the name of William Shakespeare? Was it a female of that name who wrote *King Lear*? Are you familiar with the works of a nice young lady named John Milton? Or Fräulein Goethe, a sweet German girl?” he sneered. “Perhaps you have been edified by the writings of Mademoiselle Voltaire or Miss Jonathan Swift? Phuh! Phuh! Phuh! Phuh! Phuh!”

He paused, stared deliberately across his hands, and in a moment repeated, slowly and distinctly: “The woman gave me of the tree and I did eat. Ah! that's it! There, my boy, you have it! There, in a nut-shell, you have the work for which they are best fitted.” And he turned upon me suddenly with a blaze of passion, his voice husky and tremulous from the stress of his emotion. “The tempter! The Bringer of Forbidden Fruit! The devil's ambassador! Since the beginning of time that has been their office—to madden the brain, to turn man's spirit from its highest purposes, to corrupt, to seduce, and to destroy! To creep and crawl, to intrude into the lonely places of man's heart and brain, to wind herself into the core of his most secret life as a worm

eats its way into a healthy fruit—to do all this with the guile of a serpent, the cunning of a fox—that, my boy, is what she's here for!—and she'll never change!” And, lowering his voice to an ominous and foreboding whisper, he said mysteriously, “Beware! Beware! Do not be deceived!”

In a moment more he had resumed his tone and manner of calm deliberation and, with an air of irrelevance, somewhat grudgingly, as if throwing a bone to a dog, he said, “Your aunt, of course, was a woman of considerable mentality—considerable, that is, for a female. Of course, her mind is no longer what it used to be. I never talk to her any more,” he said indifferently. “I do not listen to her. I think she said something to me about your coming out on Sunday! But I do not know. No, sir, I could not tell you what her plans are. I have my own interests, and I suppose she has hers. Of course, she has her music. . . . Yes, sir, she always has her music,” he said indifferently and contemptuously, and, staring across the apex of his hands, he forgot her.



Yet, he had been young, and full of pain and madness. For a space he had known all the torments any lover ever knew. So much my aunt had told me, and so much he had not troubled to deny. For bending toward me swiftly, fiercely, and abruptly in the full rich progress of a meal, her eyes ablaze with a mad and earnest light, she had suddenly muttered this ominous warning: “Take care, Dave! Take care, boy! You're one of them! Don't brood! Don't brood! You mustn't be mawbid,” she whispered hoarsely, fixing the mad glitter of her bright old eyes even more intensely on me. “You're like all the rest of them—it's in the blood!” she muttered, hoarsely and fatally.

“Ah, what are you talk-ing about?” Bascom snarled in a tone of the profoundest contempt. “Scotch! English! Finest people on the face of the earth—no question about it!”

“Fugitive ideation! fugitive ideation!” she chattered like a monkey over a nut. “Mind goes off in all diwections—can't keep attention focused on anything foh five minutes! The modern decadents! Wead Nordau's book, Dave—

you'll see, you'll see! You'ah all alike,” she muttered. “You'ah ovah-sexed—all of you!”

“Ah,” he snarled again, “You talk like a fool! Some more of your psychology, I suppose,” he said with a heavy sneer. “The black magic of little minds.”

He knew nothing about it, of course; occasionally he still read Kant, and he could be as deep in absolutes, categories, moments of negation, and definitions of a concept, as she with all of her complicated and extensive paraphernalia of phobias, complexes, fixations, and repressions.

Then, bending toward me once again, as if she had not heard him, she whispered: “Oh, yes! he's indifferent enough to me now—but there was a time, there was a time, I tell you!—when he was mad about me! The old fool!” she cackled suddenly and bitterly with a seeming irrelevance. Then bending forward suddenly with a resumption of her former brooding intensity she whispered: “Yes! he was mad, mad, mad! Oh, he can't deny it!” she cried. “He couldn't keep his eyes off me for a minute! He went cwazy if any other man so much as looked at me!”

“Quite true, my dear! Quite true!” my uncle said without a trace of anger or denial in his voice, with one of his sudden and astonishing changes to a mood of tender and tranquil agreement. “Oh, yes,” he said again, staring reminiscently across the apex of his great folded hands. “It is all quite true—every word as she has spoken it—quite true, quite true. I had forgotten but it's all quite true.” And he shook his gaunt head gently from side to side, turning his closed eyes downward, and snuffing gently, blindly, tenderly, with laughter, with a passive and indifferent memory.

For a year or two after his marriage he had been maddened by a black insanity of jealousy. It descended on his spirit like a choking and pestilence-laden cloud, it entered his veins with blackened tongues of poison, it crept along the conduits of his blood, sweltered venomously in his heart, it soaked into the convolutions of his brain until his brain was fanged with hatred, soaked in poison, stricken, maddened, and unhinged. His gaunt figure wasted until he became the picture of

skeletonized emaciation, jealousy and fear ate like a vulture at his entrails, all of the vital energy, the power and intensity of his life, was fed into this poisonous and consuming fire and then, when it had almost wrecked his health, ruined his career, and destroyed his reason, it left him as suddenly as it came: his life reverted to its ancient and imbedded core of egotism, he grew weary of his wife, he thought of her indifferently, he forgot her.

And she, poor soul, was like a rabbit trapped before the fierce yellow eye, the hypnotic stare of a crouching tiger. She did not know whether he would spring, strike forth his paw to maul her, or walk off indifferently. She was dazed and stricken before the violence of his first passion, the unreasoning madness of his jealousy, and in the years that followed she was bewildered, resentful, and finally embittered by the abrupt indifference which succeeded it—an indifference so great that at times he seemed to forget her very existence for days at a time, to live with her in a little house as if he were scarcely conscious of her presence, stumping about the place in an intensity of self-absorption while he cursed and muttered to himself, banged open furnace doors, chopped up whatever combinations of raw foods his fantastic imagination might contrive, and answering her impatiently and contemptuously when she spoke to him: "What did you say-y? Oh, what are you talk-ing about?"—and he would stump away again, absorbed mysteriously with his own affairs. And sometimes, if he was the victim of conspiracy in the universe—if God had forsaken him and man had tricked and cheated him, he would roll upon the floor, hammer his heels against the wall, and howl his curses at oblivious heaven.

Louise, meanwhile, her children having left her, played Wagner on the gramophone, kept her small house tidy, and learned to carry on involved and animated conversations with herself, or even with her pots and pans, for when she scrubbed and cleaned them, she would talk to them: if she dropped one, she would scold it, pick it from the floor, spank it across the bottom, saying: "No, you don't! Naughty, you bad thing, you!" And often, while he stumped through the house, these solitary conversations were interspersed by fits of

laughter: she would bend double over her pots snuffling with soft laughter which was faintly broken at its climax, a long high "Who-o-op." Then she would shake her head pityingly, and be off again, but at what she was laughing she could not have said.

Suddenly one night, however, she interrupted one of Bascom's stamping and howling tirades by putting on her tiny gramophone *The Ride of the Valkyries*, as recorded by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. Bascom, after the first paralysis of his surprise had passed, rushed furiously toward the offending instrument that was providing such melodious but mighty competition. Then Bascom halted; for suddenly he noticed that Louise was standing beside the instrument, that she was snuffling through her nose with laughter, and that from time to time she looked craftily toward him, and broke into a high piercing cackle. Bascom also noticed that she held a large carving knife in her hand. With a loud yell he turned and fled toward his room, where he locked the door, crying out strongly in an agony of terror: "O mamma! Mamma! Save me!"

All this had amused Louise enormously. She played the record over time after time, forever snuffling with laughter and the high cackle: "Who-oo-oo!" She bent double with it.



The next morning after Bascom had gone furtively away to his office, Louise looked at her image in a mirror. She looked for a long time, and she said: "I wonder if I am going mad."

Her face at fifty was bloodless, bird-like, her bright eyes badly paunched and rimmed with red; her hair was dead white—all her delicate features were minutely carved with a fabric of tiny wrinkles. So she said: "I wonder if I'm going mad," and took up the study of psychology.

She read all the works of William James, and those of Professor William McDougall as often as they appeared. She subscribed to several magazines, and wrote a book herself. She called it "The Surgery of Psychic Analysis": the publishers rejected it.

"I'm a good hundred years ahead of my time," she said to one of her daughters.

Thus, Louise found the life of rea-

son. She had found a curative for all disease: she became convinced very shortly that she was one of the very few perfectly balanced people in the world and, of course, that Bascom was utterly mad.

But sometimes, even now, the old resentment and bewilderment would return—she would remember the time of his passionate absorption in her, even the black insanity of his jealousy, with bitterness and regret.

What she had said was true. For two years after their marriage, before she had her first child, he had been like a man beset by furies. For the first time in his life his enormous egotism had been pulled away from its centre: he went outside of himself, he became acutely sensitive to the world around him. Because of the fury of possession which raged in him, because the thing he possessed must be the best and dearest thing on earth, it suddenly seemed that men were united against him in an effort to take it from him. Louise was pretty and attractive: wherever she went men looked at her, and when Bascom noticed this, it almost drove him mad.

At this time he had his first church in a town in Illinois: sometimes in the middle of a sermon he would see her face below him and his own would grow livid; he would pause suddenly and lean forward gripping the edges of his lectern like a man stricken and foolish—he would recover himself and go on brokenly and indifferently, but his spirit would twist like a tortured animal, his entrails would get numb and sick, his heart seemed frozen in a ring of poison, and a thousand horrible and foolish doubts would torment him. There was no excess of fantastic possibility, no absurdity of suspicion that he did not know: his mind swarmed with poisonous fabrications, which in a second were translated into reality: he was unable to distinguish between cold fact and his delirious fancy—the moment he imagined anything he believed it to be true.

And what was the reason for this madness? He did not know, and yet he knew that he was mad. He could sit in a chair and watch the madness soak into his brain and crawl along his flesh as a man might watch the progress of a poison in his blood. It was a madness

that his mind contested, that his reason knew was false, and yet it conquered him. It drove him brain-sick, heart-sick, cursing through the streets at night, it drove him stamping through the streets clutching his great hands together at the waist, and if he heard a burst of laughter in the dark, if he heard voices and the pronouns "he" and "she" he was sure the words had reference to his wife and him or to a rival, and he would turn and curse the people who had spoken. The interest of the earth and of the town he thought was fastened on his own life and his wife's: the earth was full of malevolent voices, evil whisperings—he saw himself at times as trapped, duped, tricked and mocked at by all men; he greeted his parishioners with a sick heart and a livid smile, and he searched their eyes, their faces, for a sly lurking humor, an evil and secret glee, or for some evidence that they knew the nature of his hurt, the ugly dishonor in his brain and heart, the foul color of his secret.

And it was not, it could no longer be, he felt, a secret; he felt as naked as an infant, he thought the reason for his grief was legible in every word and action, and when he went out in the streets, sometimes his spirit cowered in a dreadful kind of shame—he felt like shielding his face from sight. Shame pressed upon him from the skies, he could not escape it—and when it was not shame of his own dishonor, it was shame because he feared that he was being mocked and jeered at as a fool and cuckold by the world.

Great shapes of fear and cruelty were evoked out of immense and timeless skies, they hovered above him wherever he went, they darkened the wintry lights of desolate little towns like smears of blood: it seemed to him that there would never again be joy and confidence on earth, that the shapes of death and madness would walk in his brain forever and, having lost his faith in God, he now sought desperately for some faith in man: he dreamed of finding some earthly father, some man superior to himself in strength, wisdom, and age to whom he could confess the burden of his packed and overlaid heart, from whom he might derive some wisdom, some medicine for the plague that was consuming him.

But he never found him, in his heart he knew that such a physician and con-

fessor did not exist: he was caught in a trap, he could not confess the evil weight that lay upon his soul, he took the last full measure of man's loneliness. He could not add to his own dishonor by bringing dishonor on his wife, and always there was a censor in his brain, a core of sanity that in the darkest and vilest hours yet judged fairly, and told him he was mad.

Then it left him. When it seemed that life was no longer tolerable it left him. It guttered out as a fierce flame gutters out of the fuel it has fed upon, and it left him full of weariness, indifference, and a sense of completion: he turned from the hurt, bewildered woman into the orbit of his own remote and secret life, he went on into new lives, new places and projects, and he forgot her.



And now, as I looked at the old man, I had a sense of union with the past. It seemed to me if he would only speak, the living past, the voices of lost men, the pain, the pride, the madness and despair, the million scenes and faces of the buried life—all that an old man ever knew—would be revealed to me, would be delivered to me like a priceless treasure, as an inheritance which old men owed to young, and which should be the end and effort of all living. My savage hunger was a kind of memory: I thought if he could speak, it would be fed.

And for a moment, it seemed, I saw the visages of time, dark time, the million lock-bolts shot back in man's memory, the faces of the lost Americans, and all the million casual moments of their lives, with Bascom blazing at them from a dozen pulpits, Bascom, tortured by love and madness, walking the streets of the nation, stumping the rutted roads, muttering through darkness with clasped bony hands, a gaunt and twisted figure reeling below immense and cruel skies across the continent. Light fell upon his face and darkness crossed it:—he came up from the wilderness, from derbied men and bustling women, from all of the memories of lavish brown, and from time, dark time—from a time that was further off than Saxon thanes, all of the knights, the spearheads, and the horses.

Was all this lost?

"It was so long ago," the old man said.

Bitterly, bitterly Boston one time more: the flying leaf, the broken cloud. Was no love crying in the wilderness?

"—So long ago. I have lived so long. I have seen so much. I could tell you so many things," my uncle said huskily, with weariness and indifference. His eye was lustreless and dead, he looked for a moment tired and old.

All at once, a strange and perplexing vision, which was to return many times in the years that followed, came to me. It was this: there were a company of old men and women at dinner, seated together around a table. All of them were very old, older than my uncle; the faces of the old men and women were fragile and delicate like old yellowed china, their faces were frail and sexless, they had begun to look alike. In their youth all these people had known one another. The men had drunk, fought, whored, hated one another, and loved the women. Some had been devoured by the sterile and corrupt fear and envy that young men know. In secret their lips were twisted, their faces livid, and their hearts bitter; their eyes glittered with a reptilian hatred of another man—they dreaded his success, and they exulted in his failure, laughing with a delirious joy when they heard or read of his hurt, defeat or humiliation. They had been afraid to speak or confess what was in their hearts, they feared the mockery of their fellows; with one another their words were careful, picked, and disparaging. They gave the lie to passion and belief and they said what they knew was false. And yet along dark roads at night they had shouted out into the howling winds their great goat cries of joy, exultancy and power; they had smelled snow in thick brooding air at night, and they had watched it come, softly spitting at the window glass, numbing the footfalls of the earth with its soft silent fall, filling their hearts with a dark proud ecstasy, touching their entrails with impending prophecy. Each had a thousand dark desires and fantasies; each wanted wealth, power, fame and love; each saw himself as great, good and talented; each feared and hated rivals in business or in love—and in crowds they glared at one another with hard hostile eyes, they bristled up like crested cocks, they

watched their women jealously, felt looks and glances through their shoulder blades, and hated men with white spermatic necks, amorous hair, and faces proud and insolent with female conquest.

They had been young and full of pain and combat, and now all this was dead in them: they smiled mildly, feebly, gently, they spoke in thin voices, and they looked at one another with eyes dead to desire, hostility, and passion.

As for the old women, they sat there on their yellowed and bony haunches. They were all beyond the bitter pain and ecstasy of youth—its frenzy, its hope, its sinew of bright blood and agony: they were beyond the pain and fear of anything save age and death. Here was a faithful wife, a fruitful mother; here was an adulterous and voluptuous woman, the potent mistress of a dozen men, here was her cuckold husband, who had screamed like a tortured animal when he had found her first in bed with another man, and here was the man he found her with; here was another man in whom the knowledge of his wife's infidelity had aroused only a corrupt inverted joy, he exulted in it, he urged her on into new love affairs, he besought her greedily to taunt him with it, he fed upon his pain—and now they were all old and meagre and had the look of yellowed china. They turned their mild sunken faces toward one another with looks in which there was neither hate nor love nor desire nor passion, they laughed thinly, and their memory was all of little things.

They no longer wanted to excel or to be first; they were no longer mad and jealous; they no longer hated rivals; they no longer wanted fame; they no longer cared for work or grew drunk on hope; they no longer turned into the dark and struck their bloody knuckles at the wall; they no longer writhed with shame upon their beds, cursed at the memory of defeat and desolation, or ripped the sheets between convulsive fingers. Could they not speak? Had they forgotten?

Why could not the old men speak? They had known pain, death and madness, yet all their words were stale and rusty. They had known the wilderness, the savage land, the blood of the murdered men ran down into the earth that gave no answer; and they had seen

it, they had shed it. Where were the passion, pain and pride, the million living moments of their lives? Was all this lost? Were they all tongueless? It seemed to me that there was something sly and evil in their glances as they sat together, as if they hoarded some cunning and malevolent wisdom in their brains, as if the medicine to all our grief and error was in them, but as if through the evil and conspire communication of their glance, they had resolved to keep it from us. Or were they simply devoured with satiety, with weariness and indifference? Did they refuse to speak because they could not speak, because even memory had gone lifeless in them?

Yes. Words echoed in their throat but they were tongueless. For them the past was dead: they poured into our hands a handful of dry dust and ashes.



The dry bones, the bitter dust? The living wilderness, the silent waste? The barren land?

Have no lips trembled in the wilderness? No eyes sought seaward from the rock's sharp edge for men returning home? Has no pulse beat more hot with love or hate upon the river's edge? Or where the old wheel and the rusted stock lie stogged in desert sand: by the horsehead a woman's skull. No love?

No lonely footfalls in a million streets, no heart that beat its best and bloodiest cry out against the steel and stone, no aching brain, caught in its iron ring, groping among the labyrinthine canyons? Naught in that immense and lonely land but incessant growth and ripeness and pollution, the emptiness of forests and deserts, the unhearted, harsh and metal jangle of a million tongues, crying the belly-cry for bread, or the great cat's snarl for meat and honey? All, then, all? Birth and the twenty thousand days of snarl and jangle—and no love, no love? Was no love crying in the wilderness?

It was not true. The lovers lay below the lilac bush; the laurel leaves were trembling in the wood.

Suddenly it seemed to me, that if I could put my hand upon my uncle, if I could grip my fingers in his stringy arm, my strength and youth would go

into him, and I could rekindle memory like a living flame in him, I could animate for an hour his ancient heart with the exultancy, the power, the joy that pulsed in me; I could make the old man speak.

I wanted to speak to him as people never speak to one another, I wanted to say and hear the things one never says and hears. I wanted to know what his own youth beyond its grim weather of poverty, loneliness, and desperation had been like. He had been over ten years old when the war had ended, he had seen the men plod home in wreaths of dust and heard their casual voices in a room, he had breathed the air of vanished summers, he had seen cloud shadows floating on the massed green of the wilderness, the twisting of a last lone leaf upon a bough; and he had heard the desolate and stricken voices in the South long, long ago, the quiet and casual voices of lost men, a million vanished footsteps in the streets of life. And he had known the years of brown, dark lavish brown, the lost and hypocritic years, the thunder of the wheels and hooves upon the cobbles, the color of bright blood—the savagery, the hunger and the fear.

Was the memory of all this lost?

I touched him—I put my hand upon his shoulder, he did not move. Sunken in what lost world, buried in what incommunicable and tongueless past, he said—"So long ago."

Then I got up and left him and went out into the streets where the singing and lyrical air, the man-swarm passing in its million-footed weft, the glorious women and the girls compacted in a single music of belly and breasts and thighs, the sea, the earth, the proud, potent, clamorous city, all of the voices of time fused to a unity that was like a song, a token and a cry. Victoriously, I trod the neck of doubt as if it were a serpent: I was joined to the earth, a part of it, and I possessed it; I would be wasted and consumed, filled and renewed eternally; I would feel unceasingly alternate tides of life and dark oblivion; I would be emptied without weariness, replenished forever with strong joy. I had a tongue for agony, a food for hunger, a door for exile and a surfeit for insatiate desire: exultant certainty welled up in me, I thought I could possess it all, and I cried: "Yes! It will be mine!"