The Pig and the Whitle

George Gissing

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'I possess a capital of thirty thousand pounds. One third of this is invested in railway shares, which bear interest at three and a half per cent.; another third is in Government stock, and produces two and three−quarters per cent.; the rest is lent on mortgages, at three per cent. Calculate my income for the present year.'

This kind of problem was constantly being given out by Mr. Ruddiman, assistant master at Longmeadows School. Mr. Ruddiman, who had reached the age of five−and−forty, and who never in his life had possessed five−and−forty pounds, used his arithmetic lesson as an opportunity for flight of imagination. When dictating a sum in which he attributed to himself enormous wealth, his eyes twinkled, his slender body struck a dignified attitude, and he smiled over the class with a certain genial condescension. When the calculation proposed did not refer to personal income it generally illustrated the wealth of the nation, in which Mr. Ruddiman had a proud delight. He would bid his youngsters compute the proceeds of some familiar tax, and the vast sum it represented rolled from his lips on a note of extraordinary satisfaction, as if he gloried in this evidence of national prosperity. His salary at Longmeadows just sufficed to keep him decently clad and to support him during the holidays. He had been a master here for seven years, and earnestly hoped that his services might be retained for at least seven more; there was very little chance of his ever obtaining a better position, and the thought of being east adrift, of having to betake himself to the school agencies and enter upon new engagements, gave Mr. Ruddiman a very unpleasant sensation. In his time he had gone through hardships such as naturally befall a teacher without diplomas and possessed of no remarkable gifts; that he had never broken down in health was the result of an admirable constitution and of much native cheerfulness. Only at such an establishment as Longmeadows — an old−fashioned commercial 'academy,' recommended to parents by the healthiness of its rural situation — could he have hoped to hold his ground against modern educational tendencies, which aim at obliterating Mr. Ruddiman and all his kind. Every one liked him; impossible not to like a man so abounding in kindliness and good humour; but his knowledge was anything but extensive, and his methods in instruction had a fine flavour of antiquity. Now and then Mr. Ruddiman asked himself what was to become of him when sickness or old age forbade his earning even the modest income upon which he could at present count, but his happy temper dismissed the troublesome reflection. One thing, however, he had decided; in future he would find some more economical way of spending his holidays. Hitherto he had been guilty of the extravagance of taking long journeys to see members of his scattered family, or of going to the seaside, or of amusing him self (oh, how innocent]y!) in London. This kind of thing must really stop. In the coming summer vacation he had determined to save at least five sovereigns, and he fancied he had discovered a simple way of doing it.

On pleasant afternoons, when he was 'off duty,' Mr. Ruddiman liked to have a long ramble by himself about the fields and lanes. In solitude he was never dull; had you met him during one of these afternoon walks, more likely than not you would have seen a gentle smile on his visage as he walked with head bent. Not that his thoughts were definitely of agreeable things; consciously he thought perhaps of nothing at all; but he liked the sunshine and country quiet, and the sense of momentary independence. Every one would have known him for what he was. His dress, his gait, his countenance, declared the under−master. Mr. Ruddiman never carried a walking−stick; that would have seemed to him to be arrogating a social position to which he had no claim. Generally he held his hands together behind him; if not so, one of them would dip its fingers into a waistcoat pocket and the other grasp the lapel of his coat. If anything he looked rather less than his age, a result, perhaps, of having always lived with the young. His features were agreeably insignificant; his body, though slight of build, had something of athletic outline, due to long practice at cricket, football, and hockey.

If he had rather more time than usual at his disposal he walked as far as the Pig and Whistle, a picturesque little wayside inn, which stood alone, at more than a mile from the nearest village. To reach the Pig and Whistle one climbed a long, slow ascent, and in warm weather few pedestrians, or, for the matter of that, folks driving or

riding, could resist the suggestion of the ivy−shadowed porch which admitted to the quaint parlour. So long was it since the swinging sign had been painted that neither of Pig nor of Whistle was any trace now discoverable; but over the porch one read clearly enough the landlord's name: William Fouracres. Only three years ago had Mr. Fouracres established himself here; Ruddiman remembered his predecessor, with whom he had often chatted whilst drinking his modest bottle of ginger beer. The present landlord was a very different sort of man, less affable, not disposed to show himself to every comer. Customers were generally served by the landlord's daughter, and with her Mr. Ruddiman had come to be on very pleasant terms.

But as this remark may easily convey a false impression, it must be added that Miss Fouracres was a very discreet, well−spoken, deliberate person, of at least two−and−thirty. Mr. Ruddiman had known her for more than a year before anything save brief civilities passed between them. In the second twelvemonth of their acquaintance they readied the point of exchanging reminiscences as to the weather, discussing the agricultural prospects of the county, and remarking on the advantage to rural innkeepers of the fashion of bicycling. In the third year they were quite intimate; so intimate, indeed, that when Mr. Fouracres chanced to be absent they spoke of his remarkable history. For the landlord of the Pig and Whistle had a history worth talking about, and Mr. Ruddiman had learnt it from the landlord's own lips. Miss Fouracres would never have touched upon the subject with any one in whom she did not feel confidence; to her it was far from agreeable, and Mr. Ruddiman established himself in her esteem by taking the same view of the matter.

Well, one July afternoon, when the summer vacation drew near, the under−master perspired up the sunny road with another object than that of refreshing himself at the familiar little inn. He entered by the ivied porch, and within, as usual, found Miss Fouracres, who sat behind the bar sewing. Miss Fouracres wore a long white apron, which protected her dress from neck to feet, and gave her an appearance of great neatness and coolness. She had a fresh complexion, and features which made no disagreeable impression. At sight of the visitor she rose, and, as her habit was, stood with one hand touching her chin, whilst she smiled the discreetest of modest welcomes.

'Good day, Miss Fouracres,' said the under−master, after his usual little cough.

'Good day, sir,' was the reply, in a country voice which had a peculiar note of honesty. Miss Fouracres had never yet learnt her acquaintance's name.

'Splendid weather for the crops. I'll take a ginger−beer, if you please.'

'Indeed, that it is, sir. Ginger−beer; yes, sir.'

Then followed two or three minutes of silence. Miss Fouracres had resumed her sewing, though not her seat. Mr. Ruddiman sipped his beverage more gravely than usual.

'How is Mr. Fouracres?' he asked at length.

'I'm sorry to say, sir,' was the subdued reply, 'that he's thinking about the Prince.'

'Oh, dear!' sighed Mr. Ruddiman, as one for whom this mysterious answer had distressing significance. 'That's a great pity.'

'Yes, sir. And I'm sorry to say,' went on Miss Fouracres, in the same confidential tone, 'that the Prince is coming here. I don't mean here, sir, to the Pig and Whistle, but to Woodbury Manor. Father saw it in the newspaper, and since then he's had no rest, day or night. He's sitting out in the garden. I don't know whether you'd like to go and speak to him, sir?'

'I will. Yes, I certainly will. But there's something I should like to ask you about first, Miss Fouracres. I'm thinking of staying in this part of the country through the holidays' — long ago he had made known his position — 'and it has struck me that perhaps I could lodge here. Could you let me have a room? Just a bedroom would be enough.'

'Why, yes, sir,' replied the landlord's daughter. 'We have two bedrooms, you know, and I've no doubt my father would be willing to arrange with you.'

'Ah, then I'll mention it to him. Is he in very low spirits?'

'He's unusual low to−day, sir. I shouldn't wonder if it did him good to see you, and talk a bit.'

Having finished his ginger−beer, Mr. Ruddiman walked through the house and passed out into the garden, where he at once became aware of Mr. Fouracres. The landlord, a man of sixty, with grizzled hair and large, heavy countenance, sat in a rustic chair under an apple−tree; beside him was a little table, on which stood a bottle of whisky and a glass. Approaching, Mr. Ruddiman saw reason to suspect that the landlord had partaken too freely of the refreshment ready to his hand. Mr. Fouracres' person was in a limp state; his cheeks were very highly

coloured, and his head kept nodding as he muttered to himself. At the visitor's greeting he looked up with a sudden surprise, as though he resented an intrusion on his privacy.

'It's very hot, Mr. Fouracres,' the under−master went on to remark with cordiality.

'Hot? I dare say it is,' replied the landlord severely. 'And what else do you expect at this time of the year, sir?'

'Just so, Mr. Fouracres, just so!' said the other, as good−humouredly as possible. 'You don't find it unpleasant?'

'Why should I, sir? It was a good deal hotter day than this when His Royal Highness called upon me; a good deal hotter. The Prince didn't complain; not he. He said to me — I'm speaking of His Royal Highness, you understand; I hope you understand that, sir?'

'Oh, perfectly!'

'His words were — "Very seasonable weather, Mr. Fouracres." I'm not likely to forget what he said; so it's no use you or any one else trying to make out that he didn't say that. I tell you he did! "Very seasonable weather, Mr. Fouracres" — calling me by name, just like that. And it's no good you nor anybody else ——'

The effort of repeating the Prince's utterance with what was meant to be a princely accent proved so exhausting to Mr. Fouracres that he sank together in his chair and lost all power of coherent speech. In a moment he seemed to be sleeping. Having watched him a little while, Mr. Ruddiman spoke his name, and tried to attract his attention; finding it useless he went back into the inn.

'I'm afraid I shall have to put it off to another day,' was his remark to the landlord's daughter. 'Mr. Fouracres is — rather drowsy.'

'Ah, sir!' sighed the young woman. 'I'm sorry to say he's often been like that lately.'

Their eyes met, but only for an instant. Mr. Ruddiman looked and felt uncomfortable.

'I'll come again very soon, Miss Fouracres,' he said. 'You might just speak to your father about the room.'

'Thank you, sir. I will, sir.'

And, with another uneasy glance, which was not returned, the under−master went his way. Descending towards Longmeadows, he thought over the innkeeper's story, which may be briefly related. Some ten years before this Mr. Fouracres occupied a very comfortable position; he was landlord of a flourishing inn — called an hotel — in a little town of some importance as an agricultural centre, and seemed perfectly content with the life and the society natural to a man so circumstanced. His manners were marked by a certain touch of pompousness, and he liked to dwell upon the excellence of the entertainment which his house afforded, but these were innocent characteristics which did not interfere with his reputation as a sensible and sound man of business. It happened one day that two gentlemen on horseback, evidently riding for their pleasure, stopped at the inn door, and, after a few inquiries, announced that they would alight and have lunch. Mr. Fouracres — who himself received these gentlemen — regarded one of them with much curiosity, and presently came to the startling conclusion that he was about to entertain no less a person than the Heir Apparent. He knew that the Prince was then staying at a great house some ten miles away, and there could be no doubt that one of his guests had a strong resemblance to the familiar portraits of His Royal Highness. In his excitement at the supposed discovery, Mr. Fouracres at once communicated it to those about him, and in a very few minutes half the town had heard the news. Of course the host would allow no one but himself to wait at the royal table — which was spread in the inn's best room guarded against all intrusion. In vain, however, did he listen for a word from either of the gentlemen which might confirm his belief; in their conversation no name or title was used, and no mention made of anything significant. They remained for an hour. When their horses were brought round for them a considerable crowd had gathered before the hotel, and the visitors departed amid a demonstration of exuberant loyalty. On the following day, one or two persons who had been present at this scene declared that the two gentlemen showed surprise, and that, though both raised their hats in acknowledgment of the attention they received, they rode away laughing.

For the morrow brought doubts. People began to say that the Prince had never been near the town at all, and that evidence could be produced of his having passed the whole day at the house where he was a visitor. Mr. Fouracres smiled disdainfully; no assertion or argument availed to shake his proud assurance that he had entertained the Heir to the Throne. From that day he knew no peace. Fired with an extraordinary arrogance, he viewed as his enemy every one who refused to believe in the Prince's visit; he quarrelled violently with many of his best friends; he brought insulting accusations against all manner of persons. Before long the man was honestly convinced that there existed a conspiracy to rob him of a distinction that was his due. Political animus had, perhaps, something to do with it, for the Liberal newspaper (Mr. Fouracres was a stout Conservative) made more

than one malicious joke on the subject. A few townsmen stood by the landlord's side and used their ingenuity in discovering plausible reasons why the Prince did not care to have it publicly proclaimed that he had visited the town and lunched at the hotel. These partisans scorned the suggestion that Mr. Fouracres had made a mistake, but they were unable to deny that a letter, addressed to the Prince himself, with a view to putting an end to the debate, had elicited (in a secretarial hand) a brief denial of the landlord's story. Evidently something very mysterious underlay the whole affair, and there was much shaking of heads for a long time.

To Mr. Fouracres the result of the honour he so strenuously vindicated was serious indeed. By way of defiance to all mockers he wished to change the time−honoured sign of the inn, and to substitute for it the Prince of Wales's Feathers. On this point he came into conflict with the owner of the property, and, having behaved very violently, received notice that his lease, just expiring, would not be renewed. Whereupon what should Mr. Fouracres do but purchase land and begin to build for himself an hotel twice as large as that he must shortly quit. On this venture he used all, and more than all, his means, and, as every one had prophesied, he was soon a ruined man. In less than three years from the fatal day he turned his back upon the town where he had known respect and prosperity, and went forth to earn his living as best he could. After troublous wanderings, on which he was accompanied by his daughter, faithful and devoted, though she had her doubts on a certain subject, the decayed publican at length found a place of rest. A small legacy from a relative had put it in his power to make a new, though humble, beginning in business; he established himself at the Pig and Whistle.

The condition in which he had to−day been discovered by Mr. Ruddiman was not habitual with him. Once a month, perhaps, his melancholy thoughts drove him to the bottle; for the most part he led a sullen, brooding life, indifferent to the state of his affairs, and only animated when he found a new and appreciative listener to the story of his wrongs. That he had been grievously wronged was Mr. Fouracres' immutable conviction. Not by His Royal Highness; the Prince knew nothing of the strange conspiracy which had resulted in Fouracres' ruin; letters addressed to His Royal Highness were evidently intercepted by underlings, and never came before the royal eyes. Again and again had Mr. Fouracres written long statements of his case, and petitioned for an audience. He was now resolved to adopt other methods; he would use the first opportunity of approaching the Prince's person, and lifting up his voice where he could not but be heard. He sought no vulgar gain; his only desire was to have this fact recognised, that he had, indeed, entertained the Prince, and so put to shame all his scornful enemies. And now the desired occasion offered itself. In the month of September His Royal Highness would be a guest at Woodbury Manor, distant only some couple of miles from the Pig and Whistle. It was the excitement of such a prospect which had led Mr. Fouracres to undue indulgence under the apple−tree this afternoon.

A week later Mr. Ruddiman again ascended the hill, and, after listening patiently to the narrative which he had heard fifty times, came to an arrangement with Mr. Fouracres about the room he wished to rent for the holidays. The terms were very moderate, and the under−master congratulated himself on this prudent step. He felt sure that a couple of months at the Pig and Whistle would be any thing but disagreeable. The situation was high and healthy; the surroundings were picturesque. And for society, well, there was Miss Fouracres, whom Mr. Ruddiman regarded as a very sensible and pleasant person.

Of course, no one at Longmeadows had an inkling of the under−master's intention. On the day of 'breaking up' he sent his luggage, as usual, to the nearest railway station, and that same evening had it conveyed by carrier to the little wayside inn, where, much at ease in mind and body, he passed his first night.

He had a few books with him, but Mr. Ruddiman was not much of a reader. In the garden of the inn, or somewhere near by, he found a spot of shade, and there, pipe in mouth, was content to fleet the hours as they did in the golden age. Now and then he tried to awaken his host's interest in questions of national finance. It was one of Mr. Ruddiman's favourite amusements to sketch Budgets in anticipation of that to be presented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he always convinced himself that his own financial expedients were much superior to those laid before Parliament. All sorts of ingenious little imposts were constantly occurring to him, and his mouth watered with delight at the sound of millions which might thus be added to the national wealth. But to Mr. Fouracres such matters seemed trivial. A churchwarden between his lips, he appeared to listen, sometimes giving a nod or a grunt; in reality his thoughts were wandering amid bygone glories, or picturing a day of brilliant revenge.

Much more satisfactory were the conversations between Mr. Ruddiman and his host's daughter; they were generally concerned with the budget, not of the nation, but of the Pig and Whistle. Miss Fouracres was a woman

of much domestic ability; she knew how to get the maximum of comfort out of small resources. But for her the inn would have been a wretched little place — as, indeed, it was before her time. Miss Fouracres worked hard and prudently. She had no help; the garden, the poultry, all the cares of house and inn were looked after by her alone — except, indeed, a few tasks beyond her physical strength, which were disdainfully performed by the landlord. A pony and cart served chiefly to give Mr. Fouracres an airing when his life of sedentary dignity grew burdensome. One afternoon, when he had driven to the market town, his daughter and her guest were in the garden together, gathering broad beans and gossiping with much contentment.

'I wish I could always live here!' exclaimed Mr. Ruddiman, after standing for a moment with eyes fixed meditatively upon a very large pod which he had just picked.

Miss Fouracres looked at him as if in surprise, her left hand clasping her chin.

'Ah, you'd soon get tired of it; sir.'

'I shouldn't! No, I'm sure I shouldn't. I like this life. It suits me. I like it a thousand times better than teaching in a school.'

'That's your fancy, sir.'

As Miss Fouracres spoke a sound from the house drew her attention; some one had entered the inn.

'A customer?' said Mr. Ruddiman. 'Let me go and serve him — do let me!'

'But you wouldn't know how, sir.'

'If it's beer, and that's most likely, I know well enough. I've watched you so often. I'll go and see.'

With the face of a schoolboy he ran into the house, and was absent about ten minutes. Then he reappeared, chinking coppers in his hand and laughing gleefully.

'A cyclist! Pint of half−and−half! I served him as if I'd done nothing else all my life.'

Miss Fouracres looked at him with wonder and admiration. She did not laugh; demonstrative mirth was not one of her characteristics; but for a long time there dwelt upon her good, plain countenance a half−smile of placid contentment. When they went in together, Mr. Ruddiman begged her to teach him all the mysteries of the bar, and his request was willingly granted. In this way they amused themselves until the return of the landlord, who, as soon as he had stabled his pony, called Mr. Ruddiman aside, and said in a hoarse whisper —

The Prince comes to−morrow!'

'Ha! does he?' was the answer, in a tone of feigned interest.

'I shall see him, It's all settled. I've made friends with one of the gardeners at Woodbury Manor, and he's promised to put me in the way of meeting His Royal Highness. I shall have to go over there for a day or two, and stay in Woodbury, to be on the spot when the chance offers.'

Mr. Fouracres had evidently been making his compact with the aid of strong liquor; he walked unsteadily, and in other ways betrayed imperfect command of himself. Presently, at the tea−table, he revealed to his daughter the great opportunity which lay before him, and spoke of the absence from home it would necessitate.

'Of course you'll do as you like, father,' replied Miss Fouracres, with her usual deliberation, and quite good−humouredly, 'but I think you 're going on a fool's errand, and that I tell you plain. If you'd just forget all about the Prince, and settle down quiet at the Pig and Whistle, it 'ud be a good deal better for you.'

The landlord regarded her with surprise and scorn. It was the first time that his daughter had ventured to express herself so unmistakably.

'The Pig and Whistle!' he exclaimed. 'A pothouse! I who have kept an hotel and entertained His Royal Highness. You speak like an ignorant woman. Hold your tongue, and don't dare to let me hear your voice again until to−morrow morning!'

Miss Fouracres obeyed him. She was absolutely mute for the rest of the evening, save when obliged to exchange a word or two with rustic company or in the taproom. Her features expressed uneasiness rather than mortification.

The next day, after an early breakfast, Mr. Fouracres set forth to the town of Woodbury. He had the face of a man with a fixed idea, and looked more obstinate, more unintelligent than ever. To his daughter he had spoken only a few cold words, and his last bidding to her was 'Take care of the pothouse!' This treatment gave Miss Fouracres much pain, for she was a softhearted woman, and had never been anything but loyal and affectionate to her father all through his disastrous years. Moreover, she liked the Pig and Whistle, and could not bear to hear it spoken of disdainfully. Before the sound of the cart had died away she had to wipe moisture from her eyes, and at

the moment when she was doing so Mr. Ruddiman came into the parlour.

'Has Mr. Fouracres gone?' asked the guest, with embarrassment.

'Just gone, sir,' replied the young woman, half turned away, and nervously fingering her chin.

'I shouldn't trouble about it if I were you, Miss Fouracres,' said Mr. Ruddiman in a tone of friendly encouragement. 'He'll soon be back, he'll soon be back, and you may depend upon it there'll be no harm done.'

'I hope so, sir, but I've an uneasy sort of feeling; I have indeed.'

'Don't you worry, Miss Fouracres. When the Prince has gone away he'll be better.'

Miss Fouracres stood for a moment with eves cast down, then, looking gravely at Mr. Ruddiman, said in a sorrowful voice——

'He calls the Pig and Whistle a pothouse.'

'Ah, that was wrong of him!' protested the other, no less earnestly. 'A pothouse, indeed! Why, it's one of the nicest little inns you could find anywhere. I'm getting fond of the Pig and Whistle. A pothouse, indeed! No, I call that shameful.'

The listener's eyes shone with gratification.

'Of course we've got to remember,' she said more softly, 'that father has known very different things.'

'I don't care what he has known!' cried Mr. Ruddiman. 'I hope I may never have a worse home than the Pig and Whistle. And I only wish I could live here all the rest of my life, instead of going hack to that beastly school!'

'Don't you like the school, Mr. Ruddiman?'

'Oh, I can't say I dislike it. But since I've been living here — well, it's no use thinking of impossibilities.'

Towards midday the pony and trap came back, driven by a lad from Woodbury, who had business in this direction. Miss Fouracres asked him to unharness and stable the pony, and whilst this was being done Mr. Ruddiman stood by, studiously observant. He had pleasure in every detail of the inn life. To−day he several times waited upon passing guests, and laughed exultantly at the perfection he was attaining. Miss Fouracres seemed hardly less pleased, but when alone she still wore an anxious look, and occasionally heaved a sigh of trouble.

Mr. Ruddiman, as usual, took an early supper, and soon after went up to his room. By ten o'clock the house was closed, and all through the night no sound disturbed the peace of the Pig and Whistle.

The morrow passed without news of Mr. Fouracres. On the morning after, just as Mr. Ruddiman was finishing his breakfast, alone in the parlour, he heard a loud cry of distress from the front part of the inn. Rushing out to see what was the matter, he found Miss Fouracres in agitated talk with a man on horseback.

'Ah, what did I say!' she cried at sight of the guest. 'Didn't I know something was going to happen? I must go at once — I must put in the pony——'

'I'll do that for you,' said Mr. Ruddiman. 'But what has happened?'

The horseman, a messenger from Woodbury, told a strange tale. Very early this morning, a gardener walking through the grounds at Woodbury Manor, and passing by a little lake or fishpond, saw the body of a man lying in the water, which at this point was not three feet in depth. He drew the corpse to the bank, and, in so doing, recognised his acquaintance, Mr. Fouracres, with whom he had spent an hour or two at a public−house in Woodbury on the evening before. How the landlord of the Pig and Whistle had come to this tragic end neither the gardener nor any one else in the neighbourhood could conjecture.

Mr. Ruddiman set to work at once on harnessing the pony, while Miss Fouracres, now quietly weeping, went to prepare herself for the journey. In a very few minutes the vehicle was ready at the door. The messenger had already ridden away.

'Can you drive yourself; Miss Fouracres?' asked Ruddiman, looking and speaking with genuine sympathy.

'Oh yes, sir But I don't know what to do about the house. I may be away all day. And what about you, sir?'

'Leave me to look after myself; Miss Fouracres. And trust me to look after the house too, will you? You know I can do it. Will you trust me?'

'It's only that I'm ashamed, sir——'

'Not a bit of it. I'm very glad, indeed, to be useful; I assure you I am.'

'But your dinner, sir?'

'Why, there's cold meat. Don't you worry, Miss Fouracres. I'll look after myself, and the house too; see if I don't. Go at once, and keep your mind at ease on my account, pray do!'

'It's very good of you, sir, I'm sure it is. Oh, I knew something was going to happen Didn't I say so?'

Mr. Ruddiman helped her into the trap; they shook hands silently, and Miss Fouracres drove away. Before the turn of the road she looked back. Ruddiman was still watching her; he waved his hand, and the young woman waved to him in reply.

Left alone, the under−master took off his coat and put on an apron, then addressed himself to the task of washing up his breakfast things. Afterwards he put his bedroom in order. About ten o'clock the first customer came in, and, as luck had it, the day proved a busier one than usual. No less than four cyclists stopped to make a meal. Mr. Ruddiman was able to supply them with cold beef and ham; moreover, he cooked eggs, he made tea — and all this with a skill and expedition which could hardly have been expected of him. None the less did he think constantly of Miss Fouracres. About five in the afternoon wheels sounded; aproned and in his shirt−sleeves, he ran to the door — as he bad already done several times at the sound of a vehicle — and with great satisfaction saw the face of his hostess. She, too, though her eyes showed she had been weeping long, smiled with gladness; the next moment she exclaimed distressfully.

'Oh, sir! To think you've been here alone all day! And in an apron!'

'Don't think about me, Miss Fouracres. You look worn out, and no wonder. I'll get you some tea at once. Let the pony stand here a little; he's not so tired as you are. Come in and have some tea, Miss Fouracres.'

Mr. Ruddiman would not be denied; he waited upon his hostess, got her a very comfortable tea, and sat near her whilst she was enjoying it. Miss Fouracres' story of the day's events still left her father's death most mysterious. All that could be certainly known was that the landlord of the Pig and Whistle had drunk rather freely with his friend the gardener at an inn at Woodbury, and towards nine o'clock in the evening had gone out, as he said, for a stroll before bedtime. Why he entered the grounds of Woodbury Manor, and how he got into the pond there, no one could say. People talked of suicide, but Miss Fouracres would not entertain that suggestion. Of course there was to be an inquest, and one could only await the result of such evidence as might be forthcoming. During the day Miss Fouracres had telegraphed to the only relatives of whom she knew anything, two sisters of her father, who kept a shop in London. Possibly one of them might come to the funeral.

'Well,' said Mr. Ruddiman, in a comforting tone, 'all you have to do is to keep quiet. Don't trouble about anything. I'll look after the business.'

Miss Fouracres smiled at him through her tears.

'It's very good of you, sir, but you make me feel ashamed. What sort of a day have you had?'

'Splendid! Look here!'

He exhibited the day's receipts, a handful of cash, and, with delight decently subdued, gave an account of all that had happened.

'I like this business!' he exclaimed. 'Don't you trouble about anything. Leave it all to me, Miss Fouracres.'

One of the London aunts came down, and passed several days at the Pig and Whistle. She was a dry, keen, elderly woman, chiefly interested in the question of her deceased brother's property, which proved to be insignificant enough. Meanwhile the inquest was held, and all the countryside talked of Mr. Fouracres, whose story, of course, was published in full detail by the news papers. Once more opinions were divided as to whether the hapless landlord really had or had not entertained His Royal Highness. Plainly, Mr. Fouracres' presence in the grounds of Woodbury Manor was due to the fact that the Prince happened to be staying there. In a state of irresponsibility, partly to be explained by intoxication, partly by the impulse of his fixed idea, he must have gone rambling in the dark round the Manor, and there, by accident, have fallen into the water. No clearer hypothesis resulted from the legal inquiry, and with this all concerned had perforce to be satisfied. Mr. Fouracres was buried, and, on the day after the funeral, his sister returned to London. She showed no interest whatever in her niece, who, equally independent, asked neither counsel nor help.

Mr. Ruddiman and his hostess were alone together at the Pig and Whistle. The situation had a certain awkwardness. Familiars of the inn — country−folk of the immediate neighbourhood — of course began to comment on the state of things, joking among themselves about Mr. Ruddiman's activity behind the bar. The under−master himself was in an uneasy frame of mind. When Miss Fouracres' aunt had gone, he paced for an hour or two about the garden; the hostess was serving cyclists. At length the familiar voice called to him.

'Will you have your dinner, Mr. Ruddiman?'

He went in, and, before entering the parlour, stood looking at a cask of ale which had been tilted forward.

'We must tap the new cask,' he remarked.

'Yes, sir, I suppose we must,' replied his hostess, half absently.

'I'll do it at once. Some more cyclists might come.'

For the rest of the day they saw very little of each other. Mr. Ruddiman rambled musing. When he came at the usual hour to supper, guests were occupying the hostess. Having eaten, he went out to smoke his pipe in the garden, and lingered there — it being a fine, warm night — till after ten o'clock. Miss Fouracres' voice aroused him from a fit of abstraction.

'I've just locked up, sir.'

'Ah! Yes. It's late.'

They stood a few paces apart. Mr. Ruddiman had one hand in his waistcoat pocket, the other behind his back; Miss Fouracres was fingering her chin.

'I've been wondering,' said the under−master in a diffident voice, 'how you'll manage all alone, Miss Fouracres.'

'Well, sir,' was the equally diffident reply, 'I've been wondering too.'

'It won't be easy to manage the Pig and Whistle all alone.'

'I'm afraid not, sir.'

'Besides, you couldn't live here in absolute solitude. [t wouldn't be safe.'

'I shouldn't quite like it, sir.'

'But I'm sure you wouldn't like to leave the Pig and Whistle, Miss Fouracres?'

'I'd much rather stay, sir, if I could any way manage it.'

Mr. Ruddiman drew a step nearer.

'Do you know, Miss Fouracres, I've been thinking just the same. The fact is, I don't like the thought of leaving the Pig and Whistle; I don't like it at all. This life suits me. Could you' — he gave a little laugh — 'engage me as your assistant, Miss Fouracres?'

'Oh, sir!'

'You couldn't?'

'How can you think of such a thing, sir.'

'Well, then, there's only one way out of the difficulty that I can see. Do you think——'

Had it not been dark Mr. Ruddiman would hardly have ventured to make the suggestion which fell from him in a whisper. Had it not been dark Miss Fouracres would assuredly have hesitated much longer before giving her definite reply. As it was, five minutes of conversation solved what had seemed a harder problem than any the under−master set to his class at Longmeadows, and when these two turned to enter the Pig and Whistle, they went hand in hand.