

Seven Men

Max Beerbohm

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- ENOCH SOAMES
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ENOCH SOAMES

When a book about the literature of the eighteen–nineties was given by Mr. Holbrook Jackson to the world, I looked eagerly in the index for SOAMES, ENOCH. I had feared he would not be there. He was not there. But everybody else was. Many writers whom I had quite forgotten, or remembered but faintly, lived again for me, they and their work, in Mr. Holbrook Jackson's pages. The book was as thorough as it was brilliantly written. And thus the omission found by me was an all the deadlier record of poor Soames' failure to impress himself on his decade.

I daresay I am the only person who noticed the omission. Soames had failed so piteously as all that! Nor is there a counterpoise in the thought that if he had had some measure of success he might have passed, like those others, out of my mind, to return only at the historian's beck. It is true that had his gifts, such as they were, been acknowledged in his life–time, he would never have made the bargain I saw him make—that strange bargain whose results have kept him always in the foreground of my memory. But it is from those very results that the full piteousness of him glares out.

Not my compassion, however, impels me to write of him. For his sake, poor fellow, I should be inclined to keep my pen out of the ink. It is ill to deride the dead. And how can I write about Enoch Soames without making him ridiculous? Or rather, how am I to hush up the horrid fact that he WAS ridiculous? I shall not be able to do that. Yet, sooner or later, write about him I must. You will see, in due course, that I have no option. And I may as well get the thing done now.

In the Summer Term of '93 a bolt from the blue flashed down on Oxford. It drove deep, it hurtlingly embedded itself in the soil. Dons and undergraduates stood around, rather pale, discussing nothing but it. Whence came it, this meteorite? From Paris. Its name? Will Rothenstein. Its aim? To do a series of twenty–four portraits in lithograph. These were to be published from the Bodley Head, London. The matter was urgent. Already the Warden of A, and the Master of B, and the Regius Professor of C, had meekly `sat.' Dignified and doddering old men, who had never consented to sit to any one, could not withstand this dynamic little stranger. He did not sue: he invited; he did not invite: he commanded. He was twenty–one years old. He wore spectacles that flashed more than any other pair ever seen. He was a wit. He was brimful of ideas. He knew Whistler. He knew Edmond de Goncourt. He knew every one in Paris. He knew them all by heart. He was Paris in Oxford. It was whispered that, so soon as he had polished off his selection of dons, he was going to include a few undergraduates. It was a proud day for me when I—I—was included. I liked Rothenstein not less than I feared him; and there arose between us a friendship that has grown ever warmer, and been more and more valued by me, with every passing year.

At the end of Term he settled in—or rather, meteoritically into—London. It was to him I owed my first knowledge of that forever enchanting little world—in–itself, Chelsea, and my first acquaintance with Walter Sickert and other august elders who dwelt there. It was Rothenstein that took me to see, in Cambridge Street, Pimlico, a young man whose drawings were already famous among the few—Aubrey Beardsley, by name. With Rothenstein I paid my first visit to the Bodley Head. By him I was inducted into another haunt of intellect and daring, the domino room of the Cafe Royal.

There, on that October evening—there, in that exuberant vista of gilding and crimson velvet set amidst all those opposing mirrors and upholding caryatids, with fumes of tobacco ever rising to the painted and pagan ceiling, and with the hum of presumably cynical conversation broken into so sharply now and again by the clatter of dominoes shuffled on marble tables, I drew a deep breath, and `This indeed,' said I to myself, `is life!'

It was the hour before dinner. We drank vermouth. Those who knew Rothenstein were pointing him out to those who knew him only by name. Men were constantly coming in through the swing–doors and wandering slowly up and down in search of vacant tables, or of tables occupied by friends. One of these rovers interested me because I was sure he wanted to catch Rothenstein's eye. He had twice passed our table, with a hesitating look; but Rothenstein, in the thick of a disquisition on Puvis de Chavannes, had not seen him. He was a stooping, shambling person, rather tall, very pale, with longish and brownish hair. He had a thin vague beard—or rather, he had a chin on which a large number of hairs weakly curled and clustered to cover its retreat. He was an

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odd-looking person; but in the 'nineties odd apparitions were more frequent, I think, than they are now. The young writers of that era—and I was sure this man was a writer—strove earnestly to be distinct in aspect. This man had striven unsuccessfully. He wore a soft black hat of clerical kind but of Bohemian intention, and a grey waterproof cape which, perhaps because it was waterproof, failed to be romantic. I decided that 'dim' was the mot juste for him. I had already essayed to write, and was immensely keen on the mot juste, that Holy Grail of the period.

The dim man was now again approaching our table, and this time he made up his mind to pause in front of it. 'You don't remember me,' he said in a toneless voice.

Rothenstein brightly focussed him. 'Yes, I do,' he replied after a moment, with pride rather than effusion—pride in a retentive memory. 'Edwin Soames.'

'Enoch Soames,' said Enoch.

'Enoch Soames,' repeated Rothenstein in a tone implying that it was enough to have hit on the surname. 'We met in Paris two or three times when you were living there. We met at the Cafe Groche.'

'And I came to your studio once.'

'Oh yes; I was sorry I was out.'

'But you were in. You showed me some of your paintings, you know.... I hear you're in Chelsea now.'

'Yes.'

I almost wondered that Mr. Soames did not, after this monosyllable, pass along. He stood patiently there, rather like a dumb animal, rather like a donkey looking over a gate. A sad figure, his. It occurred to me that 'hungry' was perhaps the mot juste for him; but—hungry for what? He looked as if he had little appetite for anything. I was sorry for him; and Rothenstein, though he had not invited him to Chelsea, did ask him to sit down and have something to drink.

Seated, he was more self-assertive. He flung back the wings of his cape with a gesture which—had not those wings been waterproof—might have seemed to hurl defiance at things in general. And he ordered an absinthe. 'Je me tiens toujours fidele,' he told Rothenstein, 'a la sorciere glauque.'

'It is bad for you,' said Rothenstein dryly.

'Nothing is bad for one,' answered Soames. 'Dans ce monde il n'y a ni de bien ni de mal.'

'Nothing good and nothing bad? How do you mean?'

'I explained it all in the preface to "Negations."'

'"Negations"?'

'Yes; I gave you a copy of it.'

'Oh yes, of course. But did you explain—for instance—that there was no such thing as bad or good grammar?'

'N-no,' said Soames. 'Of course in Art there is the good and the evil. But in Life—no.' He was rolling a cigarette. He had weak white hands, not well washed, and with finger-tips much stained by nicotine. 'In Life there are illusions of good and evil, but'—his voice trailed away to a murmur in which the words 'vieux jeu' and 'rococo' were faintly audible. I think he felt he was not doing himself justice, and feared that Rothenstein was going to point out fallacies. Anyhow, he cleared his throat and said 'Parlons d'autre chose.'

It occurs to you that he was a fool? It didn't to me. I was young, and had not the clarity of judgment that Rothenstein already had. Soames was quite five or six years older than either of us. Also, he had written a book.

It was wonderful to have written a book.

If Rothenstein had not been there, I should have revered Soames. Even as it was, I respected him. And I was very near indeed to reverence when he said he had another book coming out soon. I asked if I might ask what kind of book it was to be.

'My poems,' he answered. Rothenstein asked if this was to be the title of the book. The poet meditated on this suggestion, but said he rather thought of giving the book no title at all. 'If a book is good in itself—' he murmured, waving his cigarette.

Rothenstein objected that absence of title might be bad for the sale of a book. 'If,' he urged, 'I went into a bookseller's and said simply "Have you got?" or "Have you a copy of?" how would they know what I wanted?'

'Oh, of course I should have my name on the cover,' Soames answered earnestly. 'And I rather want,' he added, looking hard at Rothenstein, 'to have a drawing of myself as frontispiece.' Rothenstein admitted that this was a capital idea, and mentioned that he was going into the country and would be there for some time. He then

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looked at his watch, exclaimed at the hour, paid the waiter, and went away with me to dinner. Soames remained at his post of fidelity to the glaucous witch.

'Why were you so determined not to draw him?' I asked.

'Draw him? Him? How can one draw a man who doesn't exist?'

'He is dim,' I admitted. But my mot juste fell flat. Rothenstein repeated that Soames was non-existent.

Still, Soames had written a book. I asked if Rothenstein had read 'Negations.' He said he had looked into it, 'but,' he added crisply, 'I don't profess to know anything about writing.' A reservation very characteristic of the period! Painters would not then allow that any one outside their own order had a right to any opinion about painting. This law (graven on the tablets brought down by Whistler from the summit of Fujiyama) imposed certain limitations. If other arts than painting were not utterly unintelligible to all but the men who practised them, the law tottered—the Monroe Doctrine, as it were, did not hold good. Therefore no painter would offer an opinion of a book without warning you at any rate that his opinion was worthless. No one is a better judge of literature than Rothenstein; but it wouldn't have done to tell him so in those days; and I knew that I must form an unaided judgment on 'Negations.'

Not to buy a book of which I had met the author face to face would have been for me in those days an impossible act of self-denial. When I returned to Oxford for the Christmas Term I had duly secured 'Negations.' I used to keep it lying carelessly on the table in my room, and whenever a friend took it up and asked what it was about I would say 'Oh, it's rather a remarkable book. It's by a man whom I know.' Just 'what it was about' I never was able to say. Head or tail was just what I hadn't made of that slim green volume. I found in the preface no clue to the exiguous labyrinth of contents, and in that labyrinth nothing to explain the preface.

'Lean near to life. Lean very near—nearer.

'Life is web, and therein nor warp nor woof is, but web only.

'It is for this I am Catholick in church and in thought, yet do let swift Mood weave there what the shuttle of Mood wills.'

These were the opening phrases of the preface, but those which followed were less easy to understand. Then came 'Stark: A Conte,' about a midinette who, so far as I could gather, murdered, or was about to murder, a mannequin. It was rather like a story by Catulle Mendes in which the translator had either skipped or cut out every alternate sentence. Next, a dialogue between Pan and St. Ursula—lacking, I felt, in 'snap.' Next, some aphorisms (entitled 'Aphorismata' [spelled in Greek]). Throughout, in fact, there was a great variety of form; and the forms had evidently been wrought with much care. It was rather the substance that eluded me. Was there, I wondered, any substance at all? It did now occur to me: suppose Enoch Soames was a fool! Up cropped a rival hypothesis: suppose I was! I inclined to give Soames the benefit of the doubt. I had read 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune' without extracting a glimmer of meaning. Yet Mallarme—of course—was a Master. How was I to know that Soames wasn't another? There was a sort of music in his prose, not indeed arresting, but perhaps, I thought, haunting, and laden perhaps with meanings as deep as Mallarme's own. I awaited his poems with an open mind.

And I looked forward to them with positive impatience after I had had a second meeting with him. This was on an evening in January. Going into the aforesaid domino room, I passed a table at which sat a pale man with an open book before him. He looked from his book to me, and I looked back over my shoulder with a vague sense that I ought to have recognised him. I returned to pay my respects. After exchanging a few words, I said with a glance to the open book, 'I see I am interrupting you,' and was about to pass on, but 'I prefer,' Soames replied in his toneless voice, 'to be interrupted,' and I obeyed his gesture that I should sit down.

I asked him if he often read here. 'Yes; things of this kind I read here,' he answered, indicating the title of his book—'The Poems of Shelley.'

'Anything that you really—and I was going to say 'admire?'' But I cautiously left my sentence unfinished, and was glad that I had done so, for he said, with unwonted emphasis, 'Anything second-rate.'

I had read little of Shelley, but 'Of course,' I murmured, 'he's very uneven.'

'I should have thought evenness was just what was wrong with him. A deadly evenness. That's why I read him here. The noise of this place breaks the rhythm. He's tolerable here.' Soames took up the book and glanced through the pages. He laughed. Soames' laugh was a short, single and mirthless sound from the throat, unaccompanied by any movement of the face or brightening of the eyes. 'What a period!' he uttered, laying the book down. And 'What a country!' he added.

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I asked rather nervously if he didn't think Keats had more or less held his own against the drawbacks of time and place. He admitted that there were 'passages in Keats,' but did not specify them. Of 'the older men,' as he called them, he seemed to like only Milton. 'Milton,' he said, 'wasn't sentimental.' Also, 'Milton had a dark insight.' And again, 'I can always read Milton in the reading-room.'

'The reading-room?'

'Of the British Museum. I go there every day.'

'You do? I've only been there once. I'm afraid I found it rather a depressing place. It—it seemed to sap one's vitality.'

'It does. That's why I go there. The lower one's vitality, the more sensitive one is to great art. I live near the Museum. I have rooms in Dyott Street.'

'And you go round to the reading-room to read Milton?'

'Usually Milton.' He looked at me. 'It was Milton,' he certificatively added, 'who converted me to Diabolism.'

'Diabolism? Oh yes? Really?' said I, with that vague discomfort and that intense desire to be polite which one feels when a man speaks of his own religion. 'You—worship the Devil?'

Soames shook his head. 'It's not exactly worship,' he qualified, sipping his absinthe. 'It's more a matter of trusting and encouraging.'

'Ah, yes.... But I had rather gathered from the preface to "Negations" that you were a—a Catholic.'

'Je l'etais a cette epoque. Perhaps I still am. Yes, I'm a Catholic Diabolist.'

This profession he made in an almost cursory tone. I could see that what was upmost in his mind was the fact that I had read 'Negations.' His pale eyes had for the first time gleamed. I felt as one who is about to be examined, viva voce, on the very subject in which he is shakiest. I hastily asked him how soon his poems were to be published. 'Next week,' he told me.

'And are they to be published without a title?'

'No. I found a title, at last. But I shan't tell you what it is,' as though I had been so impertinent as to inquire. 'I am not sure that it wholly satisfies me. But it is the best I can find. It suggests something of the quality of the poems.... Strange growths, natural and wild, yet exquisite,' he added, 'and many-hued, and full of poisons.'

I asked him what he thought of Baudelaire. He uttered the snort that was his laugh, and 'Baudelaire,' he said, 'was a bourgeois malgre lui.' France had had only one poet: Villon; and two-thirds of Villon were sheer journalism. 'Verlaine was an epicier malgre lui.' Altogether, rather to my surprise, he rated French literature lower than English. There were 'passages' in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. But 'I,' he summed up, 'owe nothing to France.' He nodded at me. 'You'll see,' he predicted.

I did not, when the time came, quite see that. I thought the author of 'Fungoids' did—unconsciously, of course—owe something to the young Parisian decadents, or to the young English ones who owed something to THEM. I still think so. The little book—bought by me in Oxford—lies before me as I write. Its pale grey buckram cover and silver lettering have not worn well. Nor have its contents. Through these, with a melancholy interest, I have again been looking. They are not much. But at the time of their publication I had a vague suspicion that they MIGHT be. I suppose it is my capacity for faith, not poor Soames' work, that is weaker than it once was....

TO A YOUNG WOMAN.

Thou art, who hast not been!
Pale tunes irresolute
And trceries of old sounds
Blown from a rotted flute
Mingle with noise of cymbals rouged with rust,
Nor not strange forms and epicene
Lie bleeding in the dust,
Being wounded with wounds.
For this it is
That in thy counterpart
Of age-long mockeries
Thou hast not been nor art!

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There seemed to me a certain inconsistency as between the first and last lines of this. I tried, with bent brows, to resolve the discord. But I did not take my failure as wholly incompatible with a meaning in Soames' mind. Might it not rather indicate the depth of his meaning? As for the craftsmanship, 'rouged with rust' seemed to me a fine stroke, and 'nor not' instead of 'and' had a curious felicity. I wondered who the Young Woman was, and what she had made of it all. I sadly suspect that Soames could not have made more of it than she. Yet, even now, if one doesn't try to make any sense at all of the poem, and reads it just for the sound, there is a certain grace of cadence. Soames was an artist—in so far as he was anything, poor fellow!

It seemed to me, when first I read 'Fungoids,' that, oddly enough, the Diabolistic side of him was the best. Diabolism seemed to be a cheerful, even a wholesome, influence in his life.

NOCTURNE.

Round and round the shutter'd Square
I stroll'd with the Devil's arm in mine.
No sound but the scrape of his hoofs was there
And the ring of his laughter and mine.
We had drunk black wine.
I scream'd, 'I will race you, Master!'
'What matter,' he shriek'd, 'to-night
Which of us runs the faster?
There is nothing to fear to-night
In the foul moon's light!
Then I look'd him in the eyes,
And I laugh'd full shrill at the lie he told
And the gnawing fear he would fain disguise.
It was true, what I'd time and again been told:
He was old—old.

There was, I felt, quite a swing about that first stanza—a joyous and rollicking note of comradeship. The second was slightly hysterical perhaps. But I liked the third: it was so bracingly unorthodox, even according to the tenets of Soames' peculiar sect in the faith. Not much 'trusting and encouraging' here! Soames triumphantly exposing the Devil as a liar, and laughing 'full shrill,' cut a quite heartening figure, I thought—then! Now, in the light of what befell, none of his poems depresses me so much as 'Nocturne.'

I looked out for what the metropolitan reviewers would have to say. They seemed to fall into two classes: those who had little to say and those who had nothing. The second class was the larger, and the words of the first were cold; insomuch that

Strikes a note of modernity throughout... These tripping numbers.—Preston Telegraph

was the only lure offered in advertisements by Soames' publisher. I had hopes that when next I met the poet I could congratulate him on having made a stir; for I fancied he was not so sure of his intrinsic greatness as he seemed. I was but able to say, rather coarsely, when next I did see him, that I hoped 'Fungoids' was 'selling splendidly.' He looked at me across his glass of absinthe and asked if I had bought a copy. His publisher had told him that three had been sold. I laughed, as at a jest.

'You don't suppose I CARE, do you?' he said, with something like a snarl. I disclaimed the notion. He added that he was not a tradesman. I said mildly that I wasn't, either, and murmured that an artist who gave truly new and great things to the world had always to wait long for recognition. He said he cared not a sou for recognition. I agreed that the act of creation was its own reward.

His moroseness might have alienated me if I had regarded myself as a nobody. But ah! hadn't both John Lane and Aubrey Beardsley suggested that I should write an essay for the great new venture that was afoot—'The Yellow Book'? And hadn't Henry Harland, as editor, accepted my essay? And wasn't it to be in the very first number? At Oxford I was still in statu pupillari. In London I regarded myself as very much indeed a graduate now—one whom no Soames could ruffle. Partly to show off, partly in sheer good-will, I told Soames he ought to contribute to 'The Yellow Book.' He uttered from the throat a sound of scorn for that publication.

Nevertheless, I did, a day or two later, tentatively ask Harland if he knew anything of the work of a man called

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Enoch Soames. Harland paused in the midst of his characteristic stride around the room, threw up his hands towards the ceiling, and groaned aloud: he had often met 'that absurd creature' in Paris, and this very morning had received some poems in manuscript from him.

'Has he NO talent?' I asked.

'He has an income. He's all right.' Harland was the most joyous of men and most generous of critics, and he hated to talk of anything about which he couldn't be enthusiastic. So I dropped the subject of Soames. The news that Soames had an income did take the edge off solicitude. I learned afterwards that he was the son of an unsuccessful and deceased bookseller in Preston, but had inherited an annuity of 300 pounds from a married aunt, and had no surviving relatives of any kind. Materially, then, he was 'all right.' But there was still a spiritual pathos about him, sharpened for me now by the possibility that even the praises of *The Preston Telegraph* might not have been forthcoming had he not been the son of a Preston man. He had a sort of weak doggedness which I could not but admire. Neither he nor his work received the slightest encouragement; but he persisted in behaving as a personage: always he kept his dingy little flag flying. Wherever congregated the *jeunes feroces* of the arts, in whatever Soho restaurant they had just discovered, in whatever music-hall they were most frequenting, there was Soames in the midst of them, or rather on the fringe of them, a dim but inevitable figure. He never sought to propitiate his fellow-writers, never bated a jot of his arrogance about his own work or of his contempt for theirs. To the painters he was respectful, even humble; but for the poets and prosaists of 'The Yellow Book,' and later of 'The Savoy,' he had never a word but of scorn. He wasn't resented. It didn't occur to anybody that he or his Catholic Diabolism mattered. When, in the autumn of '96, he brought out (at his own expense, this time) a third book, his last book, nobody said a word for or against it. I meant, but forgot, to buy it. I never saw it, and am ashamed to say I don't even remember what it was called. But I did, at the time of its publication, say to Rothenstein that I thought poor old Soames was really a rather tragic figure, and that I believed he would literally die for want of recognition. Rothenstein scoffed. He said I was trying to get credit for a kind heart which I didn't possess; and perhaps this was so. But at the private view of the New English Art Club, a few weeks later, I beheld a pastel portrait of 'Enoch Soames, Esq.' It was very like him, and very like Rothenstein to have done it. Soames was standing near it, in his soft hat and his waterproof cape, all through the afternoon. Anybody who knew him would have recognised the portrait at a glance, but nobody who didn't know him would have recognised the portrait from its bystander: it 'existed' so much more than he; it was bound to. Also, it had not that expression of faint happiness which on this day was discernible, yes, in Soames' countenance. Fame had breathed on him. Twice again in the course of the month I went to the New English, and on both occasions Soames himself was on view there. Looking back, I regard the close of that exhibition as having been virtually the close of his career. He had felt the breath of Fame against his cheek—so late, for such a little while; and at its withdrawal he gave in, gave up, gave out. He, who had never looked strong or well, looked ghastly now—a shadow of the shade he had once been. He still frequented the domino room, but, having lost all wish to excite curiosity, he no longer read books there. 'You read only at the Museum now?' asked I, with attempted cheerfulness. He said he never went there now. 'No absinthe there,' he muttered. It was the sort of thing that in the old days he would have said for effect; but it carried conviction now. Absinthe, erst but a point in the 'personality' he had striven so hard to build up, was solace and necessity now. He no longer called it 'la sorciere glauque.' He had shed away all his French phrases. He had become a plain, unvarnished, Preston man.

Failure, if it be a plain, unvarnished, complete failure, and even though it be a squalid failure, has always a certain dignity. I avoided Soames because he made me feel rather vulgar. John Lane had published, by this time, two little books of mine, and they had had a pleasant little success of esteem. I was a—slight but definite—'personality.' Frank Harris had engaged me to kick up my heels in *The Saturday Review*, Alfred Harmsworth was letting me do likewise in *The Daily Mail*. I was just what Soames wasn't. And he shamed my gloss. Had I known that he really and firmly believed in the greatness of what he as an artist had achieved, I might not have shunned him. No man who hasn't lost his vanity can be held to have altogether failed. Soames' dignity was an illusion of mine. One day in the first week of June, 1897, that illusion went. But on the evening of that day Soames went too.

I had been out most of the morning, and, as it was too late to reach home in time for luncheon, I sought 'the Vingtieme.' This little place—*Restaurant du Vingtieme Siecle*, to give it its full title—had been discovered in '96 by the poets and prosaists, but had now been more or less abandoned in favour of some later find. I don't think it

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lived long enough to justify its name; but at that time there it still was, in Greek Street, a few doors from Soho Square, and almost opposite to that house where, in the first years of the century, a little girl, and with her a boy named De Quincey, made nightly encampment in darkness and hunger among dust and rats and old legal parchments. The Vingtieme was but a small whitewashed room, leading out into the street at one end and into a kitchen at the other. The proprietor and cook was a Frenchman, known to us as Monsieur Vingtieme; the waiters were his two daughters, Rose and Berthe; and the food, according to faith, was good. The tables were so narrow, and were set so close together, that there was space for twelve of them, six jutting from either wall.

Only the two nearest to the door, as I went in, were occupied. On one side sat a tall, flashy, rather Mephistophelian man whom I had seen from time to time in the domino room and elsewhere. On the other side sat Soames. They made a queer contrast in that sunlit room—Soames sitting haggard in that hat and cape which nowhere at any season had I seen him doff, and this other, this keenly vital man, at sight of whom I more than ever wondered whether he were a diamond merchant, a conjurer, or the head of a private detective agency. I was sure Soames didn't want my company; but I asked, as it would have seemed brutal not to, whether I might join him, and took the chair opposite to his. He was smoking a cigarette, with an untasted salmi of something on his plate and a half-empty bottle of Sauterne before him; and he was quite silent. I said that the preparations for the Jubilee made London impossible. (I rather liked them, really.) I professed a wish to go right away till the whole thing was over. In vain did I attune myself to his gloom. He seemed not to hear me nor even to see me. I felt that his behaviour made me ridiculous in the eyes of the other man. The gangway between the two rows of tables at the Vingtieme was hardly more than two feet wide (Rose and Berthe, in their ministrations, had always to edge past each other, quarrelling in whispers as they did so), and any one at the table abreast of yours was practically at yours. I thought our neighbour was amused at my failure to interest Soames, and so, as I could not explain to him that my insistence was merely charitable, I became silent. Without turning my head, I had him well within my range of vision. I hoped I looked less vulgar than he in contrast with Soames. I was sure he was not an Englishman, but what WAS his nationality? Though his jet-black hair was en brosse, I did not think he was French. To Berthe, who waited on him, he spoke French fluently, but with a hardly native idiom and accent. I gathered that this was his first visit to the Vingtieme; but Berthe was off-hand in her manner to him: he had not made a good impression. His eyes were handsome, but—like the Vingtieme's tables—too narrow and set too close together. His nose was predatory, and the points of his moustache, waxed up beyond his nostrils, gave a fixity to his smile. Decidedly, he was sinister. And my sense of discomfort in his presence was intensified by the scarlet waistcoat which tightly, and so unseasonably in June, sheathed his ample chest. This waistcoat wasn't wrong merely because of the heat, either. It was somehow all wrong in itself. It wouldn't have done on Christmas morning. It would have struck a jarring note at the first night of 'Hernani.' I was trying to account for its wrongness when Soames suddenly and strangely broke silence. 'A hundred years hence!' he murmured, as in a trance.

'We shall not be here!' I briskly but fatuously added.

'We shall not be here. No,' he droned, 'but the Museum will still be just where it is. And the reading-room, just where it is. And people will be able to go and read there.' He inhaled sharply, and a spasm as of actual pain contorted his features.

I wondered what train of thought poor Soames had been following. He did not enlighten me when he said, after a long pause, 'You think I haven't minded.'

'Minded what, Soames?'

'Neglect. Failure.'

'FAILURE?' I said heartily. 'Failure?' I repeated vaguely. 'Neglect—yes, perhaps; but that's quite another matter. Of course you haven't been—appreciated. But what then? Any artist who—who gives—' What I wanted to say was, 'Any artist who gives truly new and great things to the world has always to wait long for recognition'; but the flattery would not out: in the face of his misery, a misery so genuine and so unmasked, my lips would not say the words.

And then—he said them for me. I flushed. 'That's what you were going to say, isn't it?' he asked.

'How did you know?'

'It's what you said to me three years ago, when "Fungoids" was published.' I flushed the more. I need not have done so at all, for 'It's the only important thing I ever heard you say,' he continued. 'And I've never forgotten it.'

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It's a true thing. It's a horrible truth. But—d'you remember what I answered? I said "I don't care a sou for recognition." And you believed me. You've gone on believing I'm above that sort of thing. You're shallow. What should YOU know of the feelings of a man like me? You imagine that a great artist's faith in himself and in the verdict of posterity is enough to keep him happy.... You've never guessed at the bitterness and loneliness, the—his voice broke; but presently he resumed, speaking with a force that I had never known in him. `Posterity! What use is it to ME? A dead man doesn't know that people are visiting his grave—visiting his birthplace—putting up tablets to him—unveiling statues of him. A dead man can't read the books that are written about him. A hundred years hence! Think of it! If I could come back to life then—just for a few hours—and go to the reading-room, and READ! Or better still: if I could be projected, now, at this moment, into that future, into that reading-room, just for this one afternoon! I'd sell myself body and soul to the devil, for that! Think of the pages and pages in the catalogue: "SOAMES, ENOCH" endlessly—endless editions, commentaries, prolegomena, biographies—but here he was interrupted by a sudden loud creak of the chair at the next table. Our neighbour had half risen from his place. He was leaning towards us, apologetically intrusive.

`Excuse—permit me,' he said softly. `I have been unable not to hear. Might I take a liberty? In this little restaurant—sans—façon—he spread wide his hands—`might I, as the phrase is, "cut in"?"

I could but signify our acquiescence. Berthe had appeared at the kitchen door, thinking the stranger wanted his bill. He waved her away with his cigar, and in another moment had seated himself beside me, commanding a full view of Soames.

`Though not an Englishman,' he explained, `I know my London well, Mr. Soames. Your name and fame—Mr. Beerbohm's too—very known to me. Your point is: who am _I_?' He glanced quickly over his shoulder, and in a lowered voice said `I am the Devil.'

I couldn't help it: I laughed. I tried not to, I knew there was nothing to laugh at, my rudeness shamed me, but—I laughed with increasing volume. The Devil's quiet dignity, the surprise and disgust of his raised eyebrows, did but the more dissolve me. I rocked to and fro, I lay back aching. I behaved deplorably.

`I am a gentleman, and,' he said with intense emphasis, `I thought I was in the company of GENTLEMEN.'

`Don't!' I gasped faintly. `Oh, don't!'

`Curious, nicht wahr?' I heard him say to Soames. `There is a type of person to whom the very mention of my name is—oh—so—awfully—funny! In your theatres the dullest comedien needs only to say "The Devil!" and right away they give him "the loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind." Is it not so?"

I had now just breath enough to offer my apologies. He accepted them, but coldly, and re-addressed himself to Soames.

`I am a man of business,' he said, `and always I would put things through "right now," as they say in the States. You are a poet. Les affaires—you detest them. So be it. But with me you will deal, eh? What you have said just now gives me furiously to hope.'

Soames had not moved, except to light a fresh cigarette. He sat crouched forward, with his elbows squared on the table, and his head just above the level of his hands, staring up at the Devil. `Go on,' he nodded. I had no remnant of laughter in me now.

`It will be the more pleasant, our little deal,' the Devil went on, `because you are—I mistake not?—a Diabolist.'

`A Catholic Diabolist,' said Soames.

The Devil accepted the reservation genially. `You wish,' he resumed, `to visit now—this afternoon as—ever—is—the reading-room of the British Museum, yes? but of a hundred years hence, yes? Parfaitement. Time—an illusion. Past and future—they are as ever—present as the present, or at any rate only what you call "just—round—the—corner." I switch you on to any date. I project you—pouf! You wish to be in the reading-room just as it will be on the afternoon of June 3, 1997? You wish to find yourself standing in that room, just past the swing-doors, this very minute, yes? and to stay there till closing time? Am I right?"

Soames nodded.

The Devil looked at his watch. `Ten past two,' he said. `Closing time in summer same then as now: seven o'clock. That will give you almost five hours. At seven o'clock—pouf!—you find yourself again here, sitting at this table. I am dining to—night dans le monde—dans le higli. That concludes my present visit to your great city. I come and fetch you here, Mr. Soames, on my way home.'

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`Home?' I echoed.

`Be it never so humble!' said the Devil lightly.

`All right,' said Soames.

`Soames!' I entreated. But my friend moved not a muscle.

The Devil had made as though to stretch forth his hand across the table and touch Soames' forearm; but he paused in his gesture.

`A hundred years hence, as now,' he smiled, `no smoking allowed in the reading-room. You would better therefore——'

Soames removed the cigarette from his mouth and dropped it into his glass of Sauterne.

`Soames!' again I cried. `Can't you'—but the Devil had now stretched forth his hand across the table. He brought it slowly down on—the tablecloth. Soames' chair was empty. His cigarette floated sodden in his wine-glass. There was no other trace of him.

For a few moments the Devil let his hand rest where it lay, gazing at me out of the corners of his eyes, vulgarly triumphant.

A shudder shook me. With an effort I controlled myself and rose from my chair. `Very clever,' I said condescendingly. `But—"The Time Machine" is a delightful book, don't you think? So entirely original!'

`You are pleased to sneer,' said the Devil, who had also risen, `but it is one thing to write about an impossible machine; it is a quite other thing to be a Supernatural Power.' All the same, I had scored.

Berthe had come forth at the sound of our rising. I explained to her that Mr. Soames had been called away, and that both he and I would be dining here. It was not until I was out in the open air that I began to feel giddy. I have but the haziest recollection of what I did, where I wandered, in the glaring sunshine of that endless afternoon. I remember the sound of carpenters' hammers all along Piccadilly, and the bare chaotic look of the half-erected `stands.' Was it in the Green Park, or in Kensington Gardens, or WHERE was it that I sat on a chair beneath a tree, trying to read an evening paper? There was a phrase in the leading article that went on repeating itself in my fagged mind—`Little is hidden from this august Lady full of the garnered wisdom of sixty years of Sovereignty.' I remember wildly conceiving a letter (to reach Windsor by express messenger told to await answer):

`MADAM,—Well knowing that your Majesty is full of the garnered wisdom of sixty years of Sovereignty, I venture to ask your advice in the following delicate matter. Mr. Enoch Soames, whose poems you may or may not know,'....

Was there NO way of helping him—saving him? A bargain was a bargain, and I was the last man to aid or abet any one in wriggling out of a reasonable obligation. I wouldn't have lifted a little finger to save Faust. But poor Soames!—doomed to pay without respite an eternal price for nothing but a fruitless search and a bitter disillusioning....

Odd and uncanny it seemed to me that he, Soames, in the flesh, in the waterproof cape, was at this moment living in the last decade of the next century, poring over books not yet written, and seeing and seen by men not yet born. Uncannier and odder still, that to-night and evermore he would be in Hell. Assuredly, truth was stranger than fiction.

Endless that afternoon was. Almost I wished I had gone with Soames—not indeed to stay in the reading-room, but to sally forth for a brisk sight-seeing walk around a new London. I wandered restlessly out of the Park I had sat in. Vainly I tried to imagine myself an ardent tourist from the eighteenth century. Intolerable was the strain of the slow-passing and empty minutes. Long before seven o'clock I was back at the Vingtieme.

I sat there just where I had sat for luncheon. Air came in listlessly through the open door behind me. Now and again Rose or Berthe appeared for a moment. I had told them I would not order any dinner till Mr. Soames came. A hurdy-gurdy began to play, abruptly drowning the noise of a quarrel between some Frenchmen further up the street. Whenever the tune was changed I heard the quarrel still raging. I had bought another evening paper on my way. I unfolded it. My eyes gazed ever away from it to the clock over the kitchen door....

Five minutes, now, to the hour! I remembered that clocks in restaurants are kept five minutes fast. I concentrated my eyes on the paper. I vowed I would not look away from it again. I held it upright, at its full width, close to my face, so that I had no view of anything but it.... Rather a tremulous sheet? Only because of the draught, I told myself.

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My arms gradually became stiff; they ached; but I could not drop them—now. I had a suspicion, I had a certainty. Well, what then?... What else had I come for? Yet I held tight that barrier of newspaper. Only the sound of Berthe's brisk footstep from the kitchen enabled me, forced me, to drop it, and to utter:

`What shall we have to eat, Soames?'

`Il est souffrant, ce pauvre Monsieur Soames?' asked Berthe.

`He's only—tired.' I asked her to get some wine—Burgundy—and whatever food might be ready. Soames sat crouched forward against the table, exactly as when last I had seen him. It was as though he had never moved—he who had moved so unimaginably far. Once or twice in the afternoon it had for an instant occurred to me that perhaps his journey was not to be fruitless—that perhaps we had all been wrong in our estimate of the works of Enoch Soames. That we had been horribly right was horribly clear from the look of him. But `Don't be discouraged,' I falteringly said. `Perhaps it's only that you— didn't leave enough time. Two, three centuries hence, perhaps—'

`Yes,' his voice came. `I've thought of that.'

`And now—now for the more immediate future! Where are you going to hide? How would it be if you caught the Paris express from Charing Cross? Almost an hour to spare. Don't go on to Paris. Stop at Calais. Live in Calais. He'd never think of looking for you in Calais.'

`It's like my luck,' he said, `to spend my last hours on earth with an ass.' But I was not offended. `And a treacherous ass,' he strangely added, tossing across to me a crumpled bit of paper which he had been holding in his hand. I glanced at the writing on it—some sort of gibberish, apparently. I laid it impatiently aside.

`Come, Soames! pull yourself together! This isn't a mere matter of life and death. It's a question of eternal torment, mind you! You don't mean to say you're going to wait limply here till the Devil comes to fetch you?'

`I can't do anything else. I've no choice.'

`Come! This is "trusting and encouraging" with a vengeance! This is Diabolism run mad! I filled his glass with wine. `Surely, now that you've SEEN the brute—'

`It's no good abusing him.'

`You must admit there's nothing Miltonic about him, Soames.'

`I don't say he's not rather different from what I expected.'

`He's a vulgarian, he's a swell—mobsman, he's the sort of man who hangs about the corridors of trains going to the Riviera and steals ladies' jewel—cases. Imagine eternal torment presided over by HIM!'

`You don't suppose I look forward to it, do you?'

`Then why not slip quietly out of the way?'

Again and again I filled his glass, and always, mechanically, he emptied it; but the wine kindled no spark of enterprise in him. He did not eat, and I myself ate hardly at all. I did not in my heart believe that any dash for freedom could save him. The chase would be swift, the capture certain. But better anything than this passive, meek, miserable waiting. I told Soames that for the honour of the human race he ought to make some show of resistance. He asked what the human race had ever done for him. `Besides,' he said, `can't you understand that I'm in his power? You saw him touch me, didn't you? There's an end of it. I've no will. I'm sealed.'

I made a gesture of despair. He went on repeating the word `sealed.' I began to realise that the wine had clouded his brain. No wonder! Foodless he had gone into futurity, foodless he still was. I urged him to eat at any rate some bread. It was maddening to think that he, who had so much to tell, might tell nothing. `How was it all,' I asked, `yonder? Come! Tell me your adventures.'

`They'd make first—rate "copy," wouldn't they?'

`I'm awfully sorry for you, Soames, and I make all possible allowances; but what earthly right have you to insinuate that I should make "copy," as you call it, out of you?'

The poor fellow pressed his hands to his forehead. `I don't know,' he said. `I had some reason, I know.... I'll try to remember.'

`That's right. Try to remember everything. Eat a little more bread. What did the reading—room look like?'

`Much as usual,' he at length muttered.

`Many people there?'

`Usual sort of number.'

`What did they look like?'

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Soames tried to visualise them. 'They all,' he presently remembered, 'looked very like one another.'
My mind took a fearsome leap. 'All dressed in Jaeger?'

'Yes. I think so. Greyish–yellowish stuff.'

'A sort of uniform?' He nodded. 'With a number on it, perhaps?—a number on a large disc of metal sewn on to the left sleeve? DKF 78,910—that sort of thing?' It was even so. 'And all of them—men and women alike—looking very well–cared– for? very Utopian? and smelling rather strongly of carbolic? and all of them quite hairless?' I was right every time. Soames was only not sure whether the men and women were hairless or shorn. 'I hadn't time to look at them very closely,' he explained.

'No, of course not. But——'

'They stared at ME, I can tell you. I attracted a great deal of attention.' At last he had done that! 'I think I rather scared them. They moved away whenever I came near. They followed me about at a distance, wherever I went. The men at the round desk in the middle seemed to have a sort of panic whenever I went to make inquiries.'

'What did you do when you arrived?'

Well, he had gone straight to the catalogue, of course—to the S volumes, and had stood long before SN—SOF, unable to take this volume out of the shelf, because his heart was beating so.... At first, he said, he wasn't disappointed—he only thought there was some new arrangement. He went to the middle desk and asked where the catalogue of TWENTIETH–century books was kept. He gathered that there was still only one catalogue. Again he looked up his name, stared at the three little pasted slips he had known so well. Then he went and sat down for a long time....

'And then,' he droned, 'I looked up the "Dictionary of National Biography" and some encyclopedias.... I went back to the middle desk and asked what was the best modern book on late nineteenth–century literature. They told me Mr. T. K. Nupton's book was considered the best. I looked it up in the catalogue and filled in a form for it. It was brought to me. My name wasn't in the index, but— Yes!' he said with a sudden change of tone. 'That's what I'd forgotten. Where's that bit of paper? Give it me back.'

I, too, had forgotten that cryptic screed. I found it fallen on the floor, and handed it to him.

He smoothed it out, nodding and smiling at me disagreeably. 'I found myself glancing through Nupton's book,' he resumed. 'Not very easy reading. Some sort of phonetic spelling.... All the modern books I saw were phonetic.'

'Then I don't want to hear any more, Soames, please.'

'The proper names seemed all to be spelt in the old way. But for that, I mightn't have noticed my own name.'

'Your own name? Really? Soames, I'm VERY glad.'

'And yours.'

'No!'

'I thought I should find you waiting here to–night. So I took the trouble to copy out the passage. Read it.'

I snatched the paper. Soames' handwriting was characteristically dim. It, and the noisome spelling, and my excitement, made me all the slower to grasp what T. K. Nupton was driving at.

The document lies before me at this moment. Strange that the words I here copy out for you were copied out for me by poor Soames just seventy–eight years hence....

From p. 234 of 'English Littracher 1890–1900' bi T. K. Nupton, publishd bi th Stait, 1992:

'Fr egzarmpl, a riter ov th time, naimd Max Beerbohm, hoo woz stil alive in th twentieth senchri, rote a stauri in wich e pautraid an immajnari karrakter kauld "Enoch Soames"—a thurd–rait poit hoo beleevz imself a grate jeneus an maix a bargin with th Devvl in auder ter no wot posterriti thinx ov im! It iz a sumwot labud sattire but not without vallu az showing hou seriusli the yung men ov th aiteen–ninetiz took themselvz. Nou that the littereri profeshn haz bin auganized az a departmnt of publik servis, our riters hav found their levvl an hav lernt ter doo their duti without thort ov th morro. "Th laibrer iz werthi ov hiz hire," an that iz aul. Thank hevvn we hav no Enoch Soameses amung us to–dai!'

I found that by murmuring the words aloud (a device which I commend to my reader) I was able to master them, little by little. The clearer they became, the greater was my bewilderment, my distress and horror. The whole thing was a nightmare. Afar, the great grisly background of what was in store for the poor dear art of letters; here, at the table, fixing on me a gaze that made me hot all over, the poor fellow whom— whom evidently...but no: whatever down–grade my character might take in coming years, I should never be such a brute

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as to——

Again I examined the screeed. `Immajnari'—but here Soames was, no more imaginary, alas! than I. And `labud'—what on earth was that? (To this day, I have never made out that word.) `It's all very—baffling,' I at length stammered.

Soames said nothing, but cruelly did not cease to look at me.

`Are you sure,' I temporised, `quite sure you copied the thing out correctly?'

`Quite.'

`Well, then it's this wretched Nupton who must have made— must be going to make—some idiotic mistake.... Look here, Soames! you know me better than to suppose that I.... After all, the name "Max Beerbohm" is not at all an uncommon one, and there must be several Enoch Soameses running around—or rather, "Enoch Soames" is a name that might occur to any one writing a story. And I don't write stories: I'm an essayist, an observer, a recorder.... I admit that it's an extraordinary coincidence. But you must see——'

`I see the whole thing,' said Soames quietly. And he added, with a touch of his old manner, but with more dignity than I had ever known in him, `Parlons d'autre chose.'

I accepted that suggestion very promptly. I returned straight to the more immediate future. I spent most of the long evening in renewed appeals to Soames to slip away and seek refuge somewhere. I remember saying at last that if indeed I was destined to write about him, the supposed `stauri' had better have at least a happy ending. Soames repeated those last three words in a tone of intense scorn. `In Life and in Art,' he said, `all that matters is an INEVITABLE ending.'

`But,' I urged, more hopefully than I felt, `an ending that can be avoided ISN'T inevitable.'

`You aren't an artist,' he rasped. `And you're so hopelessly not an artist that, so far from being able to imagine a thing and make it seem true, you're going to make even a true thing seem as if you'd made it up. You're a miserable bungler. And it's like my luck.'

I protested that the miserable bungler was not I—was not going to be I—but T. K. Nupton; and we had a rather heated argument, in the thick of which it suddenly seemed to me that Soames saw he was in the wrong: he had quite physically cowered. But I wondered why—and now I guessed with a cold throb just why—he stared so, past me. The bringer of that `inevitable ending' filled the doorway.

I managed to turn in my chair and to say, not without a semblance of lightness, `Aha, come in!' Dread was indeed rather blunted in me by his looking so absurdly like a villain in a melodrama. The sheen of his tilted hat and of his shirt-front, the repeated twists he was giving to his moustache, and most of all the magnificence of his sneer, gave token that he was there only to be foiled.

He was at our table in a stride. `I am sorry,' he sneered witheringly, `to break up your pleasant party, but—'

`You don't: you complete it,' I assured him. `Mr. Soames and I want to have a little talk with you. Won't you sit? Mr. Soames got nothing—frankly nothing—by his journey this afternoon. We don't wish to say that the whole thing was a swindle—a common swindle. On the contrary, we believe you meant well. But of course the bargain, such as it was, is off.'

The Devil gave no verbal answer. He merely looked at Soames and pointed with rigid forefinger to the door. Soames was wretchedly rising from his chair when, with a desperate quick gesture, I swept together two dinner-knives that were on the table, and laid their blades across each other. The Devil stepped sharp back against the table behind him, averting his face and shuddering.

`You are not superstitious!' he hissed.

`Not at all,' I smiled.

`Soames!' he said as to an underling, but without turning his face, `put those knives straight!'

With an inhibitive gesture to my friend, `Mr. Soames,' I said emphatically to the Devil, `is a CATHOLIC Diabolist'; but my poor friend did the Devil's bidding, not mine; and now, with his master's eyes again fixed on him, he arose, he shuffled past me. I tried to speak. It was he that spoke. `Try,' was the prayer he threw back at me as the Devil pushed him roughly out through the door, `TRY to make them know that I did exist!'

In another instant I too was through that door. I stood staring all ways—up the street, across it, down it. There was moonlight and lamplight, but there was not Soames nor that other.

Dazed, I stood there. Dazed, I turned back, at length, into the little room; and I suppose I paid Berthe or Rose for my dinner and luncheon, and for Soames': I hope so, for I never went to the Vingtieme again. Ever since that

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night I have avoided Greek Street altogether. And for years I did not set foot even in Soho Square, because on that same night it was there that I paced and loitered, long and long, with some such dull sense of hope as a man has in not straying far from the place where he has lost something.... `Round and round the shutter'd Square'— that line came back to me on my lonely beat, and with it the whole stanza, ringing in my brain and bearing in on me how tragically different from the happy scene imagined by him was the poet's actual experience of that prince in whom of all princes we should put not our trust.

But—strange how the mind of an essayist, be it never so stricken, roves and ranges!—I remember pausing before a wide doorstep and wondering if perchance it was on this very one that the young De Quincey lay ill and faint while poor Ann flew as fast as her feet would carry her to Oxford Street, the `stony-hearted stepmother' of them both, and came back bearing that `glass of port wine and spices' but for which he might, so he thought, actually have died. Was this the very doorstep that the old De Quincey used to revisit in homage? I pondered Ann's fate, the cause of her sudden vanishing from the ken of her boy-friend; and presently I blamed myself for letting the past over-ride the present. Poor vanished Soames!

And for myself, too, I began to be troubled. What had I better do? Would there be a hue and cry—Mysterious Disappearance of an Author, and all that? He had last been seen lunching and dining in my company. Hadn't I better get a hansom and drive straight to Scotland Yard?... They would think I was a lunatic. After all, I reassured myself, London was a very large place, and one very dim figure might easily drop out of it unobserved—now especially, in the blinding glare of the near Jubilee. Better say nothing at all, I thought.

And I was right. Soames' disappearance made no stir at all. He was utterly forgotten before any one, so far as I am aware, noticed that he was no longer hanging around. Now and again some poet or prosaist may have said to another, `What has become of that man Soames?' but I never heard any such question asked. The solicitor through whom he was paid his annuity may be presumed to have made inquiries, but no echo of these resounded. There was something rather ghastly to me in the general unconsciousness that Soames had existed, and more than once I caught myself wondering whether Nupton, that babe unborn, were going to be right in thinking him a figment of my brain.

In that extract from Nupton's repulsive book there is one point which perhaps puzzles you. How is it that the author, though I have here mentioned him by name and have quoted the exact words he is going to write, is not going to grasp the obvious corollary that I have invented nothing? The answer can be only this: Nupton will not have read the later passages of this memoir. Such lack of thoroughness is a serious fault in any one who undertakes to do scholar's work. And I hope these words will meet the eye of some contemporary rival to Nupton and be the undoing of Nupton.

I like to think that some time between 1992 and 1997 somebody will have looked up this memoir, and will have forced on the world his inevitable and startling conclusions. And I have reasons for believing that this will be so. You realise that the reading-room into which Soames was projected by the Devil was in all respects precisely as it will be on the afternoon of June 3, 1997. You realise, therefore, that on that afternoon, when it comes round, there the self-same crowd will be, and there Soames too will be, punctually, he and they doing precisely what they did before. Recall now Soames' account of the sensation he made. You may say that the mere difference of his costume was enough to make him sensational in that uniformed crowd. You wouldn't say so if you had ever seen him. I assure you that in no period could Soames be anything but dim. The fact that people are going to stare at him, and follow him around, and seem afraid of him, can be explained only on the hypothesis that they will somehow have been prepared for his ghostly visitation. They will have been awfully waiting to see whether he really would come. And when he does come the effect will of course be—awful.

An authentic, guaranteed, proven ghost, but—only a ghost, alas! Only that. In his first visit, Soames was a creature of flesh and blood, whereas the creatures into whose midst he was projected were but ghosts, I take it—solid, palpable, vocal, but unconscious and automatic ghosts, in a building that was itself an illusion. Next time, that building and those creatures will be real. It is of Soames that there will be but the semblance. I wish I could think him destined to revisit the world actually, physically, consciously. I wish he had this one brief escape, this one small treat, to look forward to. I never forget him for long. He is where he is, and forever. The more rigid moralists among you may say he has only himself to blame. For my part, I think he has been very hardly used. It is well that vanity should be chastened; and Enoch Soames' vanity was, I admit, above the average, and called for special treatment. But there was no need for vindictiveness. You say he contracted to pay the price he is paying;

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yes; but I maintain that he was induced to do so by fraud. Well-informed in all things, the Devil must have known that my friend would gain nothing by his visit to futurity. The whole thing was a very shabby trick. The more I think of it, the more detestable the Devil seems to me.

Of him I have caught sight several times, here and there, since that day at the Vingtieme. Only once, however, have I seen him at close quarters. This was in Paris. I was walking, one afternoon, along the Rue d'Antin, when I saw him advancing from the opposite direction—over-dressed as ever, and swinging an ebony cane, and altogether behaving as though the whole pavement belonged to him. At thought of Enoch Soames and the myriads of other sufferers eternally in this brute's dominion, a great cold wrath filled me, and I drew myself up to my full height. But—well, one is so used to nodding and smiling in the street to anybody whom one knows that the action becomes almost independent of oneself: to prevent it requires a very sharp effort and great presence of mind. I was miserably aware, as I passed the Devil, that I nodded and smiled to him. And my shame was the deeper and hotter because he, if you please, stared straight at me with the utmost haughtiness.

To be cut—deliberately cut—by HIM! I was, I still am, furious at having had that happen to me.

HILARY MALTBY AND STEPHEN BRAXTON

People still go on comparing Thackeray and Dickens, quite cheerfully. But the fashion of comparing Maltby and Braxton went out so long ago as 1795. No, I am wrong. But anything that happened in the bland old days before the war does seem to be a hundred more years ago than actually it is. The year I mean is the one in whose spring—time we all went bicycling (O thrill!) in Battersea Park, and ladies wore sleeves that billowed enormously out from their shoulders, and Lord Rosebery was Prime Minister.

In that Park, in that spring—time, in that sea of sleeves, there was almost as much talk about the respective merits of Braxton and Maltby as there was about those of Rudge and Humber. For the benefit of my younger readers, and perhaps, so feeble is human memory, for the benefit of their elders too, let me state that Rudge and Humber were rival makers of bicycles, that Hilary Maltby was the author of 'Ariel in Mayfair,' and Stephen Braxton of 'A Faun on the Cotswolds.'

'Which do you think is REALLY the best—"Ariel" or "A Faun"?' Ladies were always asking one that question. 'Oh, well, you know, the two are so different. It's really very hard to compare them.' One was always giving that answer. One was not very brilliant perhaps.

The vogue of the two novels lasted throughout the summer. As both were 'firstlings,' and Great Britain had therefore nothing else of Braxton's or Maltby's to fall back on, the horizon was much scanned for what Maltby, and what Braxton, would give us next. In the autumn Braxton gave us his secondling. It was an instantaneous failure. No more was he compared with Maltby. In the spring of '96 came Maltby's secondling. Its failure was instantaneous. Maltby might once more have been compared with Braxton. But Braxton was now forgotten. So was Maltby.

This was not kind. This was not just. Maltby's first novel, and Braxton's, had brought delight into many thousands of homes. People should have paused to say of Braxton "Perhaps his third novel will be better than his second," and to say as much for Maltby. I blame people for having given no sign of wanting a third from either; and I blame them with the more zest because neither 'A Faun on the Cotswolds' nor 'Ariel in Mayfair' was a merely popular book: each, I maintain, was a good book. I don't go so far as to say that the one had 'more of natural magic, more of British woodland glamour, more of the sheer joy of life in it than anything since "As You Like It,"' though Higsby went so far as this in the Daily Chronicle; nor can I allow the claim made for the other by Grigsby in the Globe that 'for pungency of satire there has been nothing like it since Swift laid down his pen, and for sheer sweetness and tenderness of feeling—ex forti dulcedo—nothing to be mentioned in the same breath with it since the lute fell from the tired hand of Theocritus.' These were foolish exaggerations. But one must not condemn a thing because it has been over—praised. Maltby's 'Ariel' was a delicate, brilliant work; and Braxton's 'Faun,' crude though it was in many ways, had yet a genuine power and beauty. This is not a mere impression remembered from early youth. It is the reasoned and seasoned judgment of middle age. Both books have been out of print for many years; but I secured a second—hand copy of each not long ago, and found them well worth reading again.

From the time of Nathaniel Hawthorne to the outbreak of the war, current literature did not suffer from any lack of fauns. But when Braxton's first book appeared fauns had still an air of novelty about them. We had not yet tired of them and their hoofs and their slanting eyes and their way of coming suddenly out of woods to wean quiet English villages from respectability. We did tire later. But Braxton's faun, even now, seems to me an admirable specimen of his class—wild and weird, earthy, goat—like, almost convincing. And I find myself convinced altogether by Braxton's rustics. I admit that I do not know much about rustics, except from novels. But I plead that the little I do know about them by personal observation does not confirm much of what the many novelists have taught me. I plead also that Braxton may well have been right about the rustics of Gloucestershire because he was (as so many interviewers recorded of him in his brief heyday) the son of a yeoman farmer at Far Oakridge, and his boyhood had been divided between that village and the Grammar School at Stroud. Not long ago I happened to be staying in the neighbourhood, and came across several villagers who might, I assure you, have stepped straight out of Braxton's pages. For that matter, Braxton himself, whom I met often in the spring of '95, might have

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stepped straight out of his own pages.

I am guilty of having wished he would step straight back into them. He was a very surly fellow, very rugged and gruff. He was the antithesis of pleasant little Maltby. I used to think that perhaps he would have been less unamiable if success had come to him earlier. He was thirty years old when his book was published, and had had a very hard time since coming to London at the age of sixteen. Little Maltby was a year older, and so had waited a year longer; but then, he had waited under a comfortable roof at Twickenham, emerging into the metropolis for no grimmer purpose than to sit and watch the fashionable riders and walkers in Rotten Row, and then going home to write a little, or to play lawn-tennis with the young ladies of Twickenham. He had been the only child of his parents (neither of whom, alas, survived to take pleasure in their darling's sudden fame). He had now migrated from Twickenham and taken rooms in Ryder Street. Had he ever shared with Braxton the bread of adversity—but no, I think he would in any case have been pleasant. And conversely I cannot imagine that Braxton would in any case have been so.

No one seeing the two rivals together, no one meeting them at Mr. Hookworth's famous luncheon parties in the Authors' Club, or at Mrs. Foster-Dugdale's not less famous garden parties in Greville Place, would have supposed off-hand that the pair had a single point in common. Dapper little Maltby—blond, bland, diminutive Maltby, with his monocle and his gardenia; big black Braxton, with his lanky hair and his square blue jaw and his square sallow forehead. Canary and crow. Maltby had a perpetual chirrup of amusing small-talk. Braxton was usually silent, but very well worth listening to whenever he did croak. He had distinction, I admit it; the distinction of one who steadfastly refuses to adapt himself to surroundings. He stood out. He awed Mr. Hookworth. Ladies were always asking one another, rather intently, what they thought of him. One could imagine that Mr. Foster-Dugdale, had he come home from the City to attend the garden parties, might have regarded him as one from whom Mrs. Foster-Dugdale should be shielded. But the casual observer of Braxton and Maltby at Mrs. Foster-Dugdale's or elsewhere was wrong in supposing that the two were totally unlike. He overlooked one simple and obvious point. This was that he had met them both at Mrs. Foster-Dugdale's or elsewhere. Wherever they were invited, there certainly, there punctually, they would be. They were both of them gluttons for the fruits and signs of their success.

Interviewers and photographers had as little reason as had hostesses to complain of two men so earnestly and assiduously 'on the make' as Maltby and Braxton. Maltby, for all his sparkle, was earnest; Braxton, for all his arrogance, assiduous.

'A Faun on the Cotswolds' had no more eager eulogist than the author of 'Ariel in Mayfair.' When any one praised his work, Maltby would lightly disparage it in comparison with Braxton's—'Ah, if I could write like THAT!' Maltby won golden opinions in this way. Braxton, on the other hand, would let slip no opportunity for sneering at Maltby's work—'gimcrack,' as he called it. This was not good for Maltby. Different men, different methods.

'The Rape of the Lock' was 'gimcrack,' if you care to call it so; but it was a delicate, brilliant work; and so, I repeat, was Maltby's 'Ariel.' Absurd to compare Maltby with Pope? I am not so sure. I have read 'Ariel,' but have never read 'The Rape of the Lock.' Braxton's opprobrious term for 'Ariel' may not, however, have been due to jealousy alone. Braxton had imagination, and his rival did not soar above fancy. But the point is that Maltby's fancifulness went far and well. In telling how Ariel re-embodied himself from thin air, leased a small house in Chesterfield Street, was presented at a Levee, played the part of good fairy in a matter of true love not running smooth, and worked meanwhile all manner of amusing changes among the aristocracy before he vanished again, Maltby showed a very pretty range of ingenuity. In one respect, his work was a more surprising achievement than Braxton's. For whereas Braxton had been born and bred among his rustics, Maltby knew his aristocrats only through Thackeray, through the photographs and paragraphs in the newspapers, and through those passionate excursions of his to Rotten Row. Yet I found his aristocrats as convincing as Braxton's rustics. It is true that I may have been convinced wrongly. That is a point which I could settle only by experience. I shift my ground, claiming for Maltby's aristocrats just this: that they pleased me very much.

Aristocrats, when they are presented solely through a novelist's sense of beauty, do not satisfy us. They may be as beautiful as all that, but, for fear of thinking ourselves snobbish, we won't believe it. We do believe it, however, and revel in it, when the novelist saves his face and ours by a pervading irony in the treatment of what he loves. The irony must, mark you, be pervading and obvious. Disraeli's great ladies and lords won't do, for his

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irony was but latent in his homage, and thus the reader feels himself called on to worship and in duty bound to scoff. All's well, though, when the homage is latent in the irony. Thackeray, inviting us to laugh and frown over the follies of Mayfair, enables us to reel with him in a secret orgy of veneration for those fools.

Maltby, too, in his measure, enabled us to reel thus. That is mainly why, before the end of April, his publisher was in a position to state that 'the Seventh Large Impression of "Ariel in Mayfair" is almost exhausted.' Let it be put to our credit, however, that at the same moment Braxton's publisher had 'the honour to inform the public that an Eighth Large Impression of "A Faun on the Cotswolds" is in instant preparation.'

Indeed, it seemed impossible for either author to outvie the other in success and glory. Week in, week out, you saw cancelled either's every momentary advantage. A neck-and-neck race. As thus:—Maltby appears as a *Celebrity At Home in the World* (Tuesday). Ha! No, *Vanity Fair* (Wednesday) has a perfect presentment of Braxton by 'Spy.' Neck-and-neck! No, *Vanity Fair* says 'the subject of next week's cartoon will be Mr. Hilary Maltby.' Maltby wins! No, next week Braxton's in the *World*.

Throughout May I kept, as it were, my eyes glued to my field-glasses. On the first Monday in June I saw that which drew from me a hoarse ejaculation.

Let me explain that always on Monday mornings at this time of year, when I opened my daily paper, I looked with respectful interest to see what bevy of the great world had been entertained since Saturday at Keeb Hall. The list was always august and inspiring. Statecraft and Diplomacy were well threaded there with mere Lineage and mere Beauty, with Royalty sometimes, with mere Wealth never, with privileged Genius now and then. A noble composition always. It was said that the Duke of Hertfordshire cared for nothing but his collection of birds' eggs, and that the collections of guests at Keeb were formed entirely by his young Duchess. It was said that he had climbed trees in every corner of every continent. The Duchess' hobby was easier. She sat aloft and beckoned desirable specimens up.

The list published on that first Monday in June began ordinarily enough, began with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador and the Portuguese Minister. Then came the Duke and Duchess of Mull, followed by four lesser Peers (two of them Proconsuls, however) with their Peeresses, three Peers without their Peeresses, four Peeresses without their Peers, and a dozen bearers of courtesy-titles with or without their wives or husbands. The rear was brought up by 'Mr. A. J. Balfour, Mr. Henry Chaplin, and Mr. Hilary Maltby.'

Youth tends to look at the darker side of things. I confess that my first thought was for Braxton.

I forgave and forgot his faults of manner. Youth is generous. It does not criticise a strong man stricken.

And anon, so habituated was I to the parity of those two strivers, I conceived that there might be some mistake. Daily newspapers are printed in a hurry. Might not 'Henry Chaplin' be a typographical error for 'Stephen Braxton'? I went out and bought another newspaper. But Mr. Chaplin's name was in that too.

'Patience!' I said to myself. 'Braxton crouches only to spring. He will be at Keeb Hall on Saturday next.'

My mind was free now to dwell with pleasure on Maltby's great achievement. I thought of writing to congratulate him, but feared this might be in bad taste. I did, however, write asking him to lunch with me. He did not answer my letter. I was, therefore, all the more sorry, next Monday, at not finding 'and Mr. Stephen Braxton' in Keeb's week-end catalogue.

A few days later I met Mr. Hookworth. He mentioned that Stephen Braxton had left town. 'He has taken,' said Hookworth, 'a delightful bungalow on the east coast. He has gone there to WORK.' He added that he had a great liking for Braxton—'a man utterly UNSPOILT.' I inferred that he, too, had written to Maltby and received no answer.

That butterfly did not, however, appear to be hovering from flower to flower in the parterres of rank and fashion. In the daily lists of guests at dinners, receptions, dances, balls, the name of Maltby figured never. Maltby had not caught on.

Presently I heard that he, too, had left town. I gathered that he had gone quite early in June—quite soon after Keeb. Nobody seemed to know where he was. My own theory was that he had taken a delightful bungalow on the west coast, to balance Braxton. Anyhow, the parity of the two strivers was now somewhat re-established.

In point of fact, the disparity had been less than I supposed. While Maltby was at Keeb, there Braxton was also—in a sense.... It was a strange story. I did not hear it at the time. Nobody did. I heard it seventeen years later. I heard it in Lucca.

Little Lucca I found so enchanting that, though I had only a day or two to spare, I stayed there a whole month.

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I formed the habit of walking, every morning, round that high-pitched path which girdles Lucca, that wide and tree-shaded path from which one looks down over the city wall at the fertile plains beneath Lucca. There were never many people there; but the few who did come came daily, so that I grew to like seeing them and took a mild personal interest in them.

One of them was an old lady in a wheeled chair. She was not less than seventy years old, and might or might not have once been beautiful. Her chair was slowly propelled by an Italian woman. She herself was obviously Italian. Not so, however, the little gentleman who walked assiduously beside her. Him I guessed to be English. He was a very stout little gentleman, with gleaming spectacles and a full blond beard, and he seemed to radiate cheerfulness. I thought at first that he might be the old lady's resident physician; but no, there was something subtly un-professional about him: I became sure that his constancy was gratuitous, and his radiance real. And one day, I know not how, there dawned on me a suspicion that he was—who?—some one I had known—some writer—what's-his-name—something with an M—Maltby— Hilary Maltby of the long-ago!

At sight of him on the morrow this suspicion hardened almost to certainty. I wished I could meet him alone and ask him if I were not right, and what he had been doing all these years, and why he had left England. He was always with the old lady. It was only on my last day in Lucca that my chance came.

I had just lunched, and was seated on a comfortable bench outside my hotel, with a cup of coffee on the table before me, gazing across the faded old sunny piazza and wondering what to do with my last afternoon. It was then that I espied yonder the back of the putative Maltby. I hastened forth to him. He was buying some pink roses, a great bunch of them, from a market-woman under an umbrella. He looked very blank, he flushed greatly, when I ventured to accost him. He admitted that his name was Hilary Maltby. I told him my own name, and by degrees he remembered me. He apologised for his confusion. He explained that he had not talked English, had not talked to an Englishman, 'for—oh, hundreds of years.' He said that he had, in the course of his long residence in Lucca, seen two or three people whom he had known in England, but that none of them had recognised him. He accepted (but as though he were embarking on the oddest adventure in the world) my invitation that he should come and sit down and take coffee with me. He laughed with pleasure and surprise at finding that he could still speak his native tongue quite fluently and idiomatically. 'I know absolutely nothing,' he said, 'about England nowadays—except from stray references to it in the *Corriere della Sera*; nor did he show the faintest desire that I should enlighten him. 'England,' he mused, '—how it all comes back to me!'

'But not you to it?'

'Ah, no indeed,' he said gravely, looking at the roses which he had laid carefully on the marble table. 'I am the happiest of men.'

He sipped his coffee, and stared out across the piazza, out beyond it into the past.

'I am the happiest of men,' he repeated. I plied him with the spur of silence.

'And I owe it all to having once yielded to a bad impulse. Absurd, the threads our destinies hang on!'

Again I plied him with that spur. As it seemed not to prick him, I repeated the words he had last spoken. 'For instance?' I added.

'Take,' he said, 'a certain evening in the spring of '95. If, on that evening, the Duchess of Hertfordshire had had a bad cold; or if she had decided that it WOULDNT be rather interesting to go on to that party—that Annual Soiree, I think it was—of the Inkwomen's Club; or again—to go a step further back—if she hadn't ever written that one little poem, and if it HADNT been printed in "The Gentlewoman," and if the Inkwomen's committee HADNT instantly and unanimously elected her an Honorary Vice-President because of that one little poem; or if—well, if a million—and—one utterly irrelevant things hadn't happened, don't-you-know, I shouldn't be here.... I might be THERE,' he smiled, with a vague gesture indicating England.

'Suppose,' he went on, 'I hadn't been invited to that Annual Soiree; or suppose that other fellow,—

'Braxton?' I suggested. I had remembered Braxton at the moment of recognising Maltby.

'Suppose HE hadn't been asked.... But of course we both were. It happened that I was the first to be presented to the Duchess.... It was a great moment. I hoped I should keep my head. She wore a tiara. I had often seen women in tiaras, at the Opera. But I had never talked to a woman in a tiara. Tiaras were symbols to me. Eyes are just a human feature. I fixed mine on the Duchess's. I kept my head by not looking at hers. I behaved as one human being to another. She seemed very intelligent. We got on very well. Presently she asked whether I should think her VERY bold if she said how PERFECTLY divine she thought my book. I said something about doing my

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best, and asked with animation whether she had read "A Faun on the Cotswolds." She had. She said it was TOO wonderful, she said it was TOO great. If she hadn't been a Duchess, I might have thought her slightly hysterical. Her innate good-sense quickly reasserted itself. She used her great power. With a wave of her magic wand she turned into a fact the glittering possibility that had haunted me. She asked me down to Keeb.

`She seemed very pleased that I would come. Was I, by any chance, free on Saturday week? She hoped there would be some amusing people to meet me. Could I come by the 3.30? It was only an hour-and-a-quarter from Victoria. On Saturday there were always compartments reserved for people coming to Keeb by the 3.30. She hoped I would bring my bicycle with me. She hoped I wouldn't find it very dull. She hoped I wouldn't forget to come. She said how lovely it must be to spend one's life among clever people. She supposed I knew everybody here to-night. She asked me to tell her who everybody was. She asked who was the tall, dark man, over there. I told her it was Stephen Braxton. She said they had promised to introduce her to him. She added that he looked rather wonderful. "Oh, he is, very," I assured her. She turned to me with a sudden appeal: "DO you think, if I took my courage in both hands and asked him, he'd care to come to Keeb?"

`I hesitated. It would be easy to say that Satan answered FOR me; easy but untrue; it was I that babbled: "Well—as a matter of fact— since you ask me—if I were you—really I think you'd better not. He's very odd in some ways. He has an extraordinary hatred of sleeping out of London. He has the real Gloucestershire LOVE of London. At the same time, he's very shy; and if you asked him he wouldn't very well know how to refuse. I think it would be KINDER not to ask him."

`At that moment, Mrs. Wilpham—the President—loomed up to us, bringing Braxton. He bore himself well. Rough dignity with a touch of mellowness. I daresay you never saw him smile. He smiled gravely down at the Duchess, while she talked in her pretty little quick humble way. He made a great impression.

`What I had done was not merely base: it was very dangerous. I was in terror that she might rally him on his devotion to London. I didn't dare to move away. I was immensely relieved when at length she said she must be going.

`Braxton seemed loth to relax his grip on her hand at parting. I feared she wouldn't escape without uttering that invitation. But all was well.... In saying good night to me, she added in a murmur, "Don't forget Keeb—Saturday week—the 3.30." Merely an exquisite murmur. But Braxton heard it. I knew, by the diabolical look he gave me, that Braxton had heard it.... If he hadn't, I shouldn't be here.

`Was I a prey to remorse? Well, in the days between that Soiree and that Saturday, remorse often claimed me, but rapture wouldn't give me up. Arcady, Olympus, the right people, at last! I hadn't realised how good my book was—not till it got me this guerdon; not till I got it this huge advertisement. I foresaw how pleased my publisher would be. In some great houses, I knew, it was possible to stay without any one knowing you had been there. But the Duchess of Hertfordshire hid her light under no bushel. Exclusive she was, but not of publicity. Next to Windsor Castle, Keeb Hall was the most advertised house in all England.

`Meanwhile, I had plenty to do. I rather thought of engaging a valet, but decided that this wasn't necessary. On the other hand, I felt a need for three new summer suits, and a new evening suit, and some new white waistcoats. Also a smoking suit. And had any man ever stayed at Keeb without a dressing-case? Hitherto I had been content with a pair of wooden brushes, and so forth. I was afraid these would appal the footman who unpacked my things. I ordered, for his sake, a large dressing-case, with my initials engraved throughout it. It looked compromisingly new when it came to me from the shop. I had to kick it industriously, and throw it about and scratch it, so as to avert possible suspicion. The tailor did not send my things home till the Friday evening. I had to sit up late, wearing the new suits in rotation.

`Next day, at Victoria, I saw strolling on the platform many people, male and female, who looked as if they were going to Keeb—tall, cool, ornate people who hadn't packed their own things and had reached Victoria in broughams. I was ornate, but not tall nor cool. My porter was rather off-hand in his manner as he wheeled my things along to the 3.30. I asked severely if there were any compartments reserved for people going to stay with the Duke of Hertfordshire. This worked an instant change in him. Having set me in one of those shrines, he seemed almost loth to accept a tip. A snob, I am afraid.

`A selection of the tall, the cool, the ornate, the intimately acquainted with one another, soon filled the compartment. There I was, and I think they felt they ought to try to bring me into the conversation. As they were all talking about a cotillion of the previous night, I shouldn't have been able to shine. I gazed out of the window,

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with middle-class aloofness. Presently the talk drifted on to the topic of bicycles. But by this time it was too late for me to come in.

`I gazed at the squalid outskirts of London as they flew by. I doubted, as I listened to my fellow-passengers, whether I should be able to shine at Keeb. I rather wished I were going to spend the week-end at one of those little houses with back-gardens beneath the railway-line. I was filled with fears.

`For shame! thought I. Was I nobody? Was the author of "Ariel in Mayfair" nobody?

`I reminded myself how glad Braxton would be if he knew of my faint-heartedness. I thought of Braxton sitting, at this moment, in his room in Clifford's Inn and glowering with envy of his hated rival in the 3.30. And after all, how enviable I was! My spirits rose. I would acquit myself well....

`I much admired the scene at the little railway station where we alighted. It was like a fete by Lancret. I knew from the talk of my fellow-passengers that some people had been going down by an earlier train, and that others were coming by a later. But the 3.30 had brought a full score of us. Us! That was the final touch of beauty.

`Outside there were two broughams, a landau, dog-carts, a phaeton, a wagonette, I know not what. But almost everybody, it seemed, was going to bicycle. Lady Rodfitten said SHE was going to bicycle. Year after year, I had seen that famous Countess riding or driving in the Park. I had been told at fourth hand that she had a masculine intellect and could make and unmake Ministries. She was nearly sixty now, a trifle dyed and stout and weather-beaten, but still tremendously handsome, and hard as nails. One would not have said she had grown older, but merely that she belonged now to a rather later period of the Roman Empire. I had never dreamed of a time when one roof would shelter Lady Rodfitten and me. Somehow, she struck my imagination more than any of these others—more than Count Deym, more than Mr. Balfour, more than the lovely Lady Thisbe Crowborough.

`I might have had a ducal vehicle all to myself, and should have liked that; but it seemed more correct that I should use my bicycle. On the other hand, I didn't want to ride with all these people—a stranger in their midst. I lingered around the luggage till they were off, and then followed at a long distance.

`The sun had gone behind clouds. But I rode slowly, so as to be sure not to arrive hot. I passed, not without a thrill, through the massive open gates into the Duke's park. A massive man with a cockade saluted me—hearteningly—from the door of the lodge. The park seemed endless. I came, at length, to a long straight avenue of elms that were almost blatantly immemorial. At the end of it was—well, I felt like a gnat going to stay in a public building.

`If there had been turnstiles—IN and OUT—and a shilling to pay, I should have felt easier as I passed into that hall—that Palladio-Gargantuan hall. Some one, some butler or groom-of-the-chamber, murmured that her Grace was in the garden. I passed out through the great opposite doorway on to a wide spectacular terrace with lawns beyond. Tea was on the nearest of these lawns. In the central group of people—some standing, others sitting—I espied the Duchess. She sat pouring out tea, a deft and animated little figure. I advanced firmly down the steps from the terrace, feeling that all would be well so soon as I had reported myself to the Duchess.

`But I had a staggering surprise on my way to her. I espied in one of the smaller groups—whom d'you think? Braxton.

`I had no time to wonder how he had got there—time merely to grasp the black fact that he WAS there.

`The Duchess seemed really pleased to see me. She said it was TOO splendid of me to come. "You know Mr. Maltby?" she asked Lady Rodfitten, who exclaimed "Not Mr. HILARY Maltby?" with a vigorous grace that was overwhelming. Lady Rodfitten declared she was the greatest of my admirers; and I could well believe that in whatever she did she excelled all competitors. On the other hand, I found it hard to believe she was afraid of me. Yet I had her word for it that she was.

`Her womanly charm gave place now to her masculine grip. She eulogised me in the language of a seasoned reviewer on the staff of a long-established journal—wordy perhaps, but sound. I revered and loved her. I wished I could give her my undivided attention. But, whilst I sat there, teacup, in hand, between her and the Duchess, part of my brain was fearfully concerned with that glimpse I had had of Braxton. It didn't so much matter that he was here to halve my triumph. But suppose he knew what I had told the Duchess! And suppose he had—no, surely if he HAD shown me up in all my meanness she wouldn't have received me so very cordially. I wondered where she could have met him since that evening of the Inkwomen. I heard Lady Rodfitten concluding her review of "Ariel" with two or three sentences that might have been framed specially to give the publisher an easy "quote." And then I heard myself asking mechanically whether she had read "A Faun on the Cotswolds." The Duchess heard me too.

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She turned from talking to other people and said "I did like Mr. Braxton so VERY much."

`"Yes," I threw out with a sickly smile, "I'm so glad you asked him to come."

`"But I didn't ask him. I didn't DARE."

`"But—but—surely he wouldn't be—be HERE if—" We stared at each other blankly. "Here?" she echoed, glancing at the scattered little groups of people on the lawn. I glanced too. I was much embarrassed. I explained that I had seen Braxton "standing just over there" when I arrived, and had supposed he was one of the people who came by the earlier train. "Well," she said with a slightly irritated laugh, "you must have mistaken some one else for him." She dropped the subject, talked to other people, and presently moved away.

`Surely, thought I, she didn't suspect me of trying to make fun of her? On the other hand, surely she hadn't conspired with Braxton to make a fool of ME? And yet, how could Braxton be here without an invitation, and without her knowledge? My brain whirled. One thing only was clear. I could NOT have mistaken anybody for Braxton. There Braxton had stood—Stephen Braxton, in that old pepper-and-salt suit of his, with his red tie all askew, and without a hat—his hair hanging over his forehead. All this I had seen sharp and clean-cut. There he had stood, just beside one of the women who travelled down in the same compartment as I; a very pretty woman in a pale blue dress; a tall woman—but I had noticed how small she looked beside Braxton. This woman was now walking to and fro, yonder, with M. de Soveral. I had seen Braxton beside her as clearly as I now saw M. de Soveral.

`Lady Rodfitten was talking about India to a recent Viceroy. She seemed to have as firm a grip of India as of "Ariel." I sat forgotten. I wanted to arise and wander off—in a vague search for Braxton. But I feared this might look as if I were angry at being ignored. Presently Lady Rodfitten herself arose, to have what she called her "annual look round." She bade me come too, and strode off between me and the recent Viceroy, noting improvements that had been made in the grounds, suggesting improvements that might be made, indicating improvements that MUST be made. She was great on landscape-gardening. The recent Viceroy was less great on it, but great enough. I don't say I walked forgotten: the eminent woman constantly asked my opinion; but my opinion, though of course it always coincided with hers, sounded quite worthless, somehow. I longed to shine. I could only bother about Braxton.

`Lady Rodfitten's voice sounded over-strong for the stillness of evening. The shadows lengthened. My spirits sank lower and lower, with the sun. I was a naturally cheerful person, but always, towards sunset, I had a vague sense of melancholy: I seemed always to have grown weaker; morbid misgivings would come to me. On this particular evening there was one such misgiving that crept in and out of me again and again...a very horrible misgiving as to the NATURE of what I had seen.

`Well, dressing for dinner is a great tonic. Especially if one shaves. My spirits rose as I lathered my face. I smiled to my reflection in the mirror. The afterglow of the sun came through the window behind the dressing-table, but I had switched on all the lights. My new silver-topped bottles and things made a fine array. To-night I was going to shine, too. I felt I might yet be the life and soul of the party. Anyway, my new evening suit was without a fault. And meanwhile this new razor was perfect. Having shaved "down," I lathered myself again and proceeded to shave "up." It was then that I uttered a sharp sound and swung round on my heel.

`No one was there. Yet this I knew: Stephen Braxton had just looked over my shoulder. I had seen the reflection of his face beside mine—craned forward to the mirror. I had met his eyes.

`He had been with me. This I knew.

`I turned to look again at that mirror. One of my cheeks was all covered with blood. I stanchd it with a towel. Three long cuts where the razor had slipped and skipped. I plunged the towel into cold water and held it to my cheek. The bleeding went on—alarmingly. I rang the bell. No one came. I vowed I wouldn't bleed to death for Braxton. I rang again. At last a very tall powdered footman appeared—more reproachful-looking than sympathetic, as though I hadn't ordered that dressing-case specially on his behalf. He said he thought one of the housemaids would have some sticking-plaster. He was very sorry he was needed downstairs, but he would tell one of the housemaids. I continued to dab and to curse. The blood flowed less. I showed great spirit. I vowed Braxton should not prevent me from going down to dinner.

`But—a pretty sight I was when I did go down. Pale but determined, with three long strips of black sticking-plaster forming a sort of Z on my left cheek. Mr. Hilary Maltby at Keeb. Literature's Ambassador.

`I don't know how late I was. Dinner was in full swing. Some servant piloted me to my place. I sat down

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unobserved. The woman on either side of me was talking to her other neighbour. I was near the Duchess' end of the table. Soup was served to me—that dark—red soup that you pour cream into—Bortsch. I felt it would steady me. I raised the first spoonful to my lips, and—my hand gave a sudden jerk.

‘I was aware of two separate horrors—a horror that had been, a horror that was. Braxton had vanished. Not for more than an instant had he stood scowling at me from behind the opposite diners. Not for more than the fraction of an instant. But he had left his mark on me. I gazed down with a frozen stare at my shirtfront, at my white waistcoat, both dark with Bortsch. I rubbed them with a napkin. I made them worse.

‘I looked at my glass of champagne. I raised it carefully and drained it at one draught. It nerved me. But behind that shirtfront was a broken heart.

‘The woman on my left was Lady Thisbe Crowborough. I don't know who was the woman on my right. She was the first to turn and see me. I thought it best to say something about my shirtfront at once. I said it to her sideways, without showing my left cheek. Her handsome eyes rested on the splashes. She said, after a moment's thought, that they looked "rather gay." She said she thought the eternal black and white of men's evening clothes was "so very dreary." She did her best.... Lady Thisbe Crowborough did her best, too, I suppose; but breeding isn't proof against all possible shocks: she visibly started at sight of me and my Z. I explained that I had cut myself shaving. I said, with an attempt at lightness, that shy men ought always to cut themselves shaving; it made such a good conversational opening. "But surely," she said after a pause, "you don't cut yourself on purpose?" She was an abysmal fool. I didn't think so at the time. She was Lady Thisbe Crowborough. This fact hallowed her. That we didn't get on at all well was a misfortune for which I blamed only myself and my repulsive appearance and—the unforgettable horror that distracted me. Nor did I blame Lady Thisbe for turning rather soon to the man on her other side.

‘The woman on my right was talking to the man on HER other side; so that I was left a prey to secret memory and dread. I wasn't wondering, wasn't attempting to explain; I was merely remembering—and dreading. And—how odd one is!—on the top—layer of my consciousness I hated to be seen talking to no one. Mr. Maltby at Keeb. I caught the Duchess' eye once or twice, and she nodded encouragingly, as who should say "You do look rather awful, and you do seem rather out of it, but I don't for a moment regret having asked you to come." Presently I had another chance of talking. I heard myself talk. My feverish anxiety to please rather touched ME. But I noticed that the eyes of my listener wandered. And yet I was sorry when the ladies went away. I had a sense of greater exposure. Men who hadn't seen me saw me now. The Duke, as he came round to the Duchess' end of the table, must have wondered who I was. But he shyly offered me his hand as he passed, and said it was so good of me to come. I had thought of slipping away to put on another shirt and waistcoat, but had decided that this would make me the more ridiculous. I sat drinking port—poison to me after champagne, but a lulling poison—and listened to noblemen with unstained shirtfronts talking about the Australian cricket match....

‘Is Rubicon Bezique still played in England? There was a mania for it at that time. The floor of Keeb's Palladio—Gargantuan hall was dotted with innumerable little tables. I didn't know how to play. My hostess told me I must "come and amuse the dear old Duke and Duchess of Mull," and led me to a remote sofa on which an old gentleman had just sat down beside an old lady. They looked at me with a dim kind interest. My hostess had set me and left me on a small gilt chair in front of them. Before going she had conveyed to them loudly—one of them was very deaf—that I was "the famous writer." It was a long time before they understood that I was not a political writer. The Duke asked me, after a troubled pause, whether I had known "old Mr. Abraham Hayward." The Duchess said I was too young to have known Mr. Hayward, and asked if I knew her "clever friend Mr. Mallock." I said I had just been reading Mr. Mallock's new novel. I heard myself shouting a confused precis of the plot. The place where we were sitting was near the foot of the great marble staircase. I said how beautiful the staircase was. The Duchess of Mull said she had never cared very much for that staircase. The Duke, after a pause, said he had "often heard old Mr. Abraham Hayward hold a whole dinner table." There were long and frequent pauses—between which I heard myself talking loudly, frantically, sinking lower and lower in the esteem of my small audience. I felt like a man drowning under the eyes of an elderly couple who sit on the bank regretting that they can offer NO assistance. Presently the Duke looked at his watch and said to the Duchess that it was "time to be thinking of bed."

‘They rose, as it were from the bank, and left me, so to speak, under water. I watched them as they passed slowly out of sight up the marble staircase which I had mispraised. I turned and surveyed the brilliant, silent scene

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presented by the card-players.

`I wondered what old Mr. Abraham Hayward would have done in my place. Would he have just darted in among those tables and "held" them? I presumed that he would not have stolen silently away, quickly and cravenly away, up the marble staircase—as I did.

`I don't know which was the greater, the relief or the humiliation of finding myself in my bedroom. Perhaps the humiliation was the greater. There, on a chair, was my grand new smoking-suit, laid out for me—what a mockery! Once I had foreseen myself wearing it in the smoking-room at a late hour—the centre of a group of eminent men entranced by the brilliancy of my conversation. And now—! I was nothing but a small, dull, soup-stained, sticking-plastered, nerve-racked recluse. Nerves, yes. I assured myself that I had not seen— what I had seemed to see. All very odd, of course, and very unpleasant, but easily explained. Nerves. Excitement of coming to Keeb too much for me. A good night's rest: that was all I needed. To-morrow I should laugh at myself.

`I wondered that I wasn't tired physically. There my grand new silk pyjamas were, yet I felt no desire to go to bed...none while it was still possible for me to go. The little writing-table at the foot of my bed seemed to invite me. I had brought with me in my portmanteau a sheaf of letters, letters that I had purposely left unanswered in order that I might answer them on KEEB HALL note-paper. These the footman had neatly laid beside the blotting-pad on that little writing-table at the foot of the bed. I regretted that the notepaper stacked there had no ducal coronet on it. What matter? The address sufficed. If I hadn't yet made a good impression on the people who were staying here, I could at any rate make one on the people who weren't. I sat down. I set to work. I wrote a prodigious number of fluent and graceful notes.

`Some of these were to strangers who wanted my autograph. I was always delighted to send my autograph, and never perfunctory in the manner of sending it.... "Dear Madam," I remember writing to somebody that night, "were it not that you make your request for it so charmingly, I should hesitate to send you that which rarity alone can render valuable.—Yours truly, Hilary Maltby." I remember reading this over and wondering whether the word "render" looked rather commercial. It was in the act of wondering thus that I raised my eyes from the note-paper and saw, through the bars of the brass bedstead, the naked sole of a large human foot—saw beyond it the calf of a great leg; a nightshirt; and the face of Stephen Braxton. I did not move.

`I thought of making a dash for the door, dashing out into the corridor, shouting at the top of my voice for help. I sat quite still.

`What kept me to my chair was the fear that if I tried to reach the door Braxton would spring off the bed to intercept me. If I sat quite still perhaps he wouldn't move. I felt that if he moved I should collapse utterly.

`I watched him, and he watched me. He lay there with his body half-raised, one elbow propped on the pillow, his jaw sunk on his breast; and from under his black brows he watched me steadily.

`No question of mere nerves now. That hope was gone. No mere optical delusion, this abiding presence. Here Braxton was. He and I were together in the bright, silent room. How long would he be content to watch me?

`Eleven nights ago he had given me one horrible look. It was this look that I had to meet, in infinite prolongation, now, not daring to shift my eyes. He lay as motionless as I sat. I did not hear him breathing, but I knew, by the rise and fall of his chest under his nightshirt, that he was breathing heavily. Suddenly I started to my feet. For he had moved. He had raised one hand slowly. He was stroking his chin. And as he did so, and as he watched me, his mouth gradually slackened to a grin. It was worse, it was more malign, this grin, than the scowl that remained with it; and its immediate effect on me was an impulse that was as hard to resist as it was hateful. The window was open. It was nearer to me than the door. I could have reached it in time....

`Well, I live to tell the tale. I stood my ground. And there dawned on me now a new fact in regard to my companion. I had all the while been conscious of something abnormal in his attitude—a lack of ease in his gross possessiveness. I saw now the reason for this effect. The pillow on which his elbow rested was still uniformly puffed and convex; like a pillow untouched. His elbow rested but on the very surface of it, not changing the shape of it at all. His body made not the least furrow along the bed.... He had no weight.

`I knew that if I leaned forward and thrust my hand between those brass rails, to clutch his foot, I should clutch—nothing. He wasn't tangible. He was realistic. He wasn't real. He was opaque. He wasn't solid.

`Odd as it may seem to you, these certainties took the edge off my horror. During that walk with Lady Rodfitten, I had been appalled by the doubt that haunted me. But now the very confirmation of that doubt gave me a sort of courage: I could cope better with anything to-night than with actual Braxton. And the measure of the

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relief I felt is that I sat down again on my chair.

`More than once there came to me a wild hope that the thing might be an optical delusion, after all. Then would I shut my eyes tightly, shaking my head sharply; but, when I looked again, there the presence was, of course. It—he—not actual Braxton but, roughly speaking, Braxton—had come to stay. I was conscious of intense fatigue, taut and alert though every particle of me was; so that I became, in the course of that ghastly night, conscious of a great envy also. For some time before the dawn came in through the window, Braxton's eyes had been closed; little by little now his head drooped sideways, then fell on his forearm and rested there. He was asleep.

`Cut off from sleep, I had a great longing for smoke. I had cigarettes on me, I had matches on me. But I didn't dare to strike a match. The sound might have waked Braxton up. In slumber he was less terrible, though perhaps more odious. I wasn't so much afraid now as indignant. "It's intolerable," I sat saying to myself, "utterly intolerable!"

`I had to bear it, nevertheless. I was aware that I had, in some degree, brought it on myself. If I hadn't interfered and lied, actual Braxton would have been here at Keeb, and I at this moment sleeping soundly. But this was no excuse for Braxton. Braxton didn't know what I had done. He was merely envious of me. And—wanly I puzzled it out in the dawn—by very force of the envy, hatred, and malice in him he had projected hither into my presence this simulacrum of himself. I had known that he would be thinking of me. I had known that the thought of me at Keeb Hall would be of the last bitterness to his most sacred feelings. But—I had reckoned without the passionate force and intensity of the man's nature.

`If by this same strength and intensity he had merely projected himself as an invisible guest under the Duchess' roof—if his feat had been wholly, as perhaps it was in part, a feat of mere wistfulness and longing—then I should have felt really sorry for him; and my conscience would have soundly rated me in his behalf. But no; if the wretched creature HAD been invisible to me, I shouldn't have thought of Braxton at all—except with gladness that he wasn't here. That he was visible to me, and to me alone, wasn't any sign of proper remorse within me. It was but the gauge of his incredible ill-will.

`Well, it seemed to me that he was avenged—with a vengeance. There I sat, hot-browed from sleeplessness, cold in the feet, stiff in the legs, cowed and indignant all through—sat there in the broadening daylight, and in that new evening suit of mine with the Braxtonised shirtfront and waistcoat that by day were more than ever loathsome. Literature's Ambassador at Keeb.... I rose gingerly from my chair, and caught sight of my face, of my Braxtonised cheek, in the mirror. I heard the twittering of birds in distant trees. I saw through my window the elaborate landscape of the Duke's grounds, all soft in the grey bloom of early morning. I think I was nearer to tears than I had ever been since I was a child. But the weakness passed. I turned towards the personage on my bed, and, summoning all such power as was in me, WILLED him to be gone. My effort was not without result—an inadequate result. Braxton turned in his sleep.

`I resumed my seat, and...and...sat up staring and blinking, at a tall man with red hair. "I must have fallen asleep," I said. "Yessir," he replied; and his toneless voice touched in me one or two springs of memory: I was at Keeb; this was the footman who looked after me. But—why wasn't I in bed? Had I—no, surely it had been no nightmare. Surely I had SEEN Braxton on that white bed.

`The footman was impassively putting away my smoking-suit. I was too dazed to wonder what he thought of me. Nor did I attempt to stifle a cry when, a moment later, turning in my chair, I beheld Braxton leaning moodily against the mantelpiece. "Are you unwell-sir?" asked the footman. "No," I said faintly, "I'm quite well."—"Yessir. Will you wear the blue suit or the grey?"—"The grey."—"Yessir."—It seemed almost incredible that HE didn't see Braxton; HE didn't appear to me one whit more solid than the night-shirted brute who stood against the mantelpiece and watched him lay out my things.—"Shall I let your bath-water run now-sir?"—"Please, yes."—"Your bathroom's the second door to the left sir."—He went out with my bath-towel and sponge, leaving me alone with Braxton.

`I rose to my feet, mustering once more all the strength that was in me. Hoping against hope, with set teeth and clenched hands, I faced him, thrust forth my will at him, with everything but words commanded him to vanish—to cease to be.

`Suddenly, utterly, he vanished. And you can imagine the truly exquisite sense of triumph that thrilled me and continued to thrill me till I went into the bathroom and found him in my bath.

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Quivering with rage, I returned to my bedroom. "Intolerable," I heard myself repeating like a parrot that knew no other word. A bath was just what I had needed. Could I have lain for a long time basking in very hot water, and then have sponged myself with cold water, I should have emerged calm and brave; comparatively so, at any rate. I should have looked less ghastly, and have had less of a headache, and something of an appetite, when I went down to breakfast. Also, I shouldn't have been the very first guest to appear on the scene. There were five or six round tables, instead of last night's long table. At the further end of the room the butler and two other servants were lighting the little lamps under the hot dishes. I didn't like to make myself ridiculous by running away. On the other hand, was it right for me to begin breakfast all by myself at one of these round tables? I supposed it was. But I dreaded to be found eating, alone in that vast room, by the first downcomer. I sat dallying with dry toast and watching the door. It occurred to me that Braxton might occur at any moment. Should I be able to ignore him?

Some man and wife—a very handsome couple—were the first to appear. They nodded and said "good morning" when they noticed me on their way to the hot dishes. I rose—uncomfortably, guiltily—and sat down again. I rose again when the wife drifted to my table, followed by the husband with two steaming plates. She asked me if it wasn't a heavenly morning, and I replied with nervous enthusiasm that it was. She then ate kedgeree in silence. "You just finishing, what?" the husband asked, looking at my plate. "Oh, no—no—only just beginning," I assured him, and helped myself to butter. He then ate kedgeree in silence. He looked like some splendid bull, and she like some splendid cow, grazing. I envied them their eupeptic calm. I surmised that ten thousand Braxtons would not have prevented THEM from sleeping soundly by night and grazing steadily by day. Perhaps their stolidity infected me a little. Or perhaps what braced me was the great quantity of strong tea that I consumed. Anyhow I had begun to feel that if Braxton came in now I shouldn't blench nor falter.

Well, I wasn't put to the test. Plenty of people drifted in, but Braxton wasn't one of them. Lady Rodfitten—no, she didn't drift, she marched, in; and presently, at an adjacent table, she was drawing a comparison, in clarion tones, between Jean and Edouard de Reszke. It seemed to me that her own voice had much in common with Edouard's. Even more was it akin to a military band. I found myself beating time to it with my foot. Decidedly, my spirits had risen. I was in a mood to face and outface anything. When I rose from the table and made my way to the door, I walked with something of a swing—to the tune of Lady Rodfitten.

My buoyancy didn't last long, though. There was no swing in my walk when, a little later, I passed out on to the spectacular terrace. I had seen my enemy again, and had beaten a furious retreat. No doubt I should see him yet again soon—here, perhaps, on this terrace. Two of the guests were bicycling slowly up and down the long paven expanse, both of them smiling with pride in the new delicious form of locomotion. There was a great array of bicycles propped neatly along the balustrade. I recognised my own among them. I wondered whether Braxton had projected from Clifford's Inn an image of his own bicycle. He may have done so; but I've no evidence that he did. I myself was bicycling when next I saw him; but he, I remember, was on foot.

This was a few minutes later. I was bicycling with dear Lady Rodfitten. She seemed really to like me. She had come out and accosted me heartily on the terrace, asking me, because of my sticking-plaster, with whom I had fought a duel since yesterday. I did not tell her with whom, and she had already branched off on the subject of duelling in general. She regretted the extinction of duelling in England, and gave cogent reasons for her regret. Then she asked me what my next book was to be. I confided that I was writing a sort of sequel—"Ariel Returns to Mayfair." She shook her head, said with her usual soundness that sequels were very dangerous things, and asked me to tell her "briefly" the lines along which I was working. I did so. She pointed out two or three weak points in my scheme. She said she could judge better if I would let her see my manuscript. She asked me to come and lunch with her next Friday—"just our two selves"—at Rodfitten House, and to bring my manuscript with me. Need I say that I walked on air?

"And now," she said strenuously, "let us take a turn on our bicycles." By this time there were a dozen riders on the terrace, all of them smiling with pride and rapture. We mounted and rode along together. The terrace ran round two sides of the house, and before we came to the end of it these words had provisionally marshalled themselves in my mind:

TO
ELEANOR
COUNTESS OF RODFITTEN

THIS BOOK WHICH OWES ALL
TO HER WISE COUNSEL
AND UNWEARYING SUPERVISION
IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED
BY HER FRIEND
THE AUTHOR

Smiled to masonically by the passing bicyclists, and smiling masonically to them in return, I began to feel that the rest of my visit would run smooth, if only—

"Let's go a little faster. Let's race!" said Lady Rodfitten; and we did so—"just our two selves." I was on the side nearer to the balustrade, and it was on that side that Braxton suddenly appeared from nowhere, solid-looking as a rock, his arms akimbo, less than three yards ahead of me, so that I swerved involuntarily, sharply, striking broadside the front wheel of Lady Rodfitten and collapsing with her, and with a crash of machinery, to the ground.

I wasn't hurt. She had broken my fall. I wished I was dead. She was furious. She sat speechless with fury. A crowd had quickly collected—just as in the case of a street accident. She accused me now to the crowd. She said I had done it on purpose. She said such terrible things of me that I think the crowd's sympathy must have veered towards me. She was assisted to her feet. I tried to be one of the assistants. "Don't let him come near me!" she thundered. I caught sight of Braxton on the fringe of the crowd, grinning at me. "It was all HIS fault," I madly cried, pointing at him. Everybody looked at Mr. Balfour, just behind whom Braxton was standing. There was a general murmur of surprise, in which I have no doubt Mr. Balfour joined. He gave a charming, blank, deprecating smile. "I mean—I can't explain what I mean," I groaned. Lady Rodfitten moved away, refusing support, limping terribly, towards the house. The crowd followed her, solicitous. I stood helplessly, desperately, where I was.

I stood an outlaw, a speck on the now empty terrace. Mechanically I picked up my straw hat, and wheeled the two bent bicycles to the balustrade. I suppose Mr. Balfour has a charming nature. For he presently came out again—on purpose, I am sure, to alleviate my misery. He told me that Lady Rodfitten had suffered no harm. He took me for a stroll up and down the terrace, talking thoughtfully and enchantingly about things in general. Then, having done his deed of mercy, this Good Samaritan went back into the house. My eyes followed him with gratitude; but I was still bleeding from wounds beyond his skill. I escaped down into the gardens. I wanted to see no one. Still more did I want to be seen by no one. I dreaded in every nerve of me my reappearance among those people. I walked ever faster and faster, to stifle thought; but in vain. Why hadn't I simply ridden THROUGH Braxton? I was aware of being now in the park, among great trees and undulations of wild green ground. But Nature did not achieve the task that Mr. Balfour had attempted; and my anguish was unassuaged.

I paused to lean against a tree in the huge avenue that led to the huge hateful house. I leaned wondering whether the thought of re-entering that house were the more hateful because I should have to face my fellow-guests or because I should probably have to face Braxton. A church bell began ringing somewhere. And anon I was aware of another sound—a twitter of voices. A consignment of hatted and parasoled ladies was coming fast adown the avenue. My first impulse was to dodge behind my tree. But I feared that I had been observed; so that what was left to me of self-respect compelled me to meet these ladies.

The Duchess was among them. I had seen her from afar at breakfast, but not since. She carried a prayer-book, which she waved to me as I approached. I was a disastrous guest, but still a guest, and nothing could have been prettier than her smile. "Most of my men this week," she said, "are Pagans, and all the others have dispatch-boxes to go through—except the dear old Duke of Mull, who's a member of the Free Kirk. You're Pagan, of course?"

I said—and indeed it was a heart-cry—that I should like very much to come to church. "If I shan't be in the way," I rather abjectly added. It didn't strike me that Braxton would try to intercept me. I don't know why, but it never occurred to me, as I walked briskly along beside the Duchess, that I should meet him so far from the house. The church was in a corner of the park, and the way to it was by a side path that branched off from the end of the avenue. A little way along, casting its shadow across the path, was a large oak. It was from behind this tree, when we came to it, that Braxton sprang suddenly forth and tripped me up with his foot.

Absurd to be tripped up by the mere semblance of a foot? But remember, I was walking quickly, and the whole thing happened in a flash of time. It was inevitable that I should throw out my hands and come down

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headlong—just as though the obstacle had been as real as it looked. Down I came on palms and knee-caps, and up I scrambled, very much hurt and shaken and apologetic. "POOR Mr. Maltby! REALLY—!" the Duchess wailed for me in this latest of my mishaps. Some other lady chased my straw hat, which had bowled far ahead. Two others helped to brush me. They were all very kind, with a quaver of mirth in their concern for me. I looked furtively around for Braxton, but he was gone. The palms of my hands were abraded with gravel. The Duchess said I must on no account come to church NOW. I was utterly determined to reach that sanctuary. I marched firmly on with the Duchess. Come what might on the way, I wasn't going to be left out here. I was utterly bent on winning at least one respite.

`Well, I reached the little church without further molestation. To be there seemed almost too good to be true. The organ, just as we entered, sounded its first notes. The ladies rustled into the front pew. I, being the one male of the party, sat at the end of the pew, beside the Duchess. I couldn't help feeling that my position was a proud one. But I had gone through too much to take instant pleasure in it, and was beset by thoughts of what new horror might await me on the way back to the house. I hoped the Service would not be brief. The swelling and dwindling strains of the "voluntary" on the small organ were strangely soothing. I turned to give an almost feudal glance to the simple villagers in the pews behind, and saw a sight that cowed my soul.

`Braxton was coming up the aisle. He came slowly, casting a tourist's eye at the stained-glass windows on either side. Walking heavily, yet with no sound of boots on the pavement, he reached our pew. There, towering and glowering, he halted, as though demanding that we should make room for him. A moment later he edged sullenly into the pew. Instinctively I had sat tight back, drawing my knees aside, in a shudder of revulsion against contact. But Braxton did not push past me. What he did was to sit slowly and fully down on me.

`No, not down ON me. Down THROUGH me—and around me. What befell me was not mere ghastly contact with the intangible. It was inclusion, envelopment, eclipse. What Braxton sat down on was not I, but the seat of the pew; and what he sat back against was not my face and chest, but the back of the pew. I didn't realise this at the moment. All I knew was a sudden black blotting-out of all things; an infinite and impenetrable darkness. I dimly conjectured that I was dead. What was wrong with me, in point of fact, was that my eyes, with the rest of me, were inside Braxton. You remember what a great hulking fellow Braxton was. I calculate that as we sat there my eyes were just beneath the roof of his mouth. Horrible!

`Out of the unfathomable depths of that pitch darkness, I could yet hear the "voluntary" swelling and dwindling, just as before. It was by this I knew now that I wasn't dead. And I suppose I must have craned my head forward, for I had a sudden glimpse of things—a close quick downward glimpse of a pepper-and-salt waistcoat and of two great hairy hands clasped across it. Then darkness again. Either I had drawn back my head, or Braxton had thrust his forward; I don't know which. "Are you all right?" the Duchess' voice whispered, and no doubt my face was ashen. "Quite," whispered my voice. But this pathetic monosyllable was the last gasp of the social instinct in me. Suddenly, as the "voluntary" swelled to its close, there was a great sharp shuffling noise. The congregation had risen to its feet, at the entry of choir and vicar. Braxton had risen, leaving me in daylight. I beheld his towering back. The Duchess, beside him, glanced round at me. But I could not, dared not, stand up into that presented back, into that great waiting darkness. I did but clutch my hat from beneath the seat and hurry distraught down the aisle, out through the porch, into the open air.

`Whither? To what goal? I didn't reason. I merely fled—like Orestes; fled like an automaton along the path we had come by. And was followed? Yes, yes. Glancing back across my shoulder, I saw that brute some twenty yards behind me, gaining on me. I broke into a sharper run. A few sickening moments later, he was beside me, scowling down into my face.

`I swerved, dodged, doubled on my tracks, but he was always at me. Now and again, for lack of breath, I halted, and he halted with me. And then, when I had got my wind, I would start running again, in the insane hope of escaping him. We came, by what twisting and turning course I know not, to the great avenue, and as I stood there in an agony of panting I had a dazed vision of the distant Hall. Really I had quite forgotten I was staying at the Duke of Hertfordshire's. But Braxton hadn't forgotten. He planted himself in front of me. He stood between me and the house.

`Faint though I was, I could almost have laughed. Good heavens! was THAT all he wanted: that I shouldn't go back there? Did he suppose I wanted to go back there—with HIM? Was I the Duke's prisoner on parole? What was there to prevent me from just walking off to the railway station? I turned to do so.

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He accompanied me on my way. I thought that when once I had passed through the lodge gates he might vanish, satisfied. But no, he didn't vanish. It was as though he suspected that if he let me out of his sight I should sneak back to the house. He arrived with me, this quiet companion of mine, at the little railway station. Evidently he meant to see me off. I learned from an elderly and solitary porter that the next train to London was the 4.3.

Well, Braxton saw me off by the 4.3. I reflected, as I stepped up into an empty compartment, that it wasn't yet twenty-four hours ago since I, or some one like me, had alighted at that station.

The guard blew his whistle; the engine shrieked, and the train jolted forward and away; but I did not lean out of the window to see the last of my attentive friend.

Really not twenty-four hours ago? Not twenty-four years?'

Maltby paused in his narrative. 'Well, well,' he said, 'I don't want you to think I overrate the ordeal of my visit to Keeb. A man of stronger nerve than mine, and of greater resourcefulness, might have coped successfully with Braxton from first to last—might have stayed on till Monday, making a very favourable impression on every one all the while. Even as it was, even after my manifold failures and sudden flight, I don't say my position was impossible. I only say it seemed so to me. A man less sensitive than I, and less vain, might have cheered up after writing a letter of apology to his hostess, and have resumed his normal existence as though nothing very terrible had happened, after all. I wrote a few lines to the Duchess that night; but I wrote amidst the preparations for my departure from England: I crossed the Channel next morning. Throughout that Sunday afternoon with Braxton at the Keeb railway station, pacing the desolate platform with him, waiting in the desolating waiting-room with him, I was numb to regrets, and was thinking of nothing but the 4.3. On the way to Victoria my brain worked and my soul wilted. Every incident in my stay at Keeb stood out clear to me; a dreadful, a hideous pattern. I had done for myself, so far as THOSE people were concerned. And now that I had sampled THEM, what cared I for others? "Too low for a hawk, too high for a buzzard." That homely old saying seemed to sum me up. And suppose I COULD still take pleasure in the company of my own old upper-middle class, how would that class regard me now? Gossip percolates. Little by little, I was sure, the story of my Keeb fiasco would leak down into the drawing-room of Mrs. Foster-Dugdale. I felt I could never hold up my head in any company where anything of that story was known. Are you quite sure you never heard anything?'

I assured Maltby that all I had known was the great bare fact of his having stayed at Keeb Hall.

'It's curious,' he reflected. 'It's a fine illustration of the loyalty of those people to one another. I suppose there was a general agreement for the Duchess' sake that nothing should be said about her queer guest. But even if I had dared hope to be so efficiently hushed up, I couldn't have not fled. I wanted to forget. I wanted to leap into some void, far away from all reminders. I leapt straight from Ryder Street into Vaule-la-Rochette, a place of which I had once heard that it was the least frequented seaside-resort in Europe. I leapt leaving no address—leapt telling my landlord that if a suit-case and a portmanteau arrived for me he could regard them, them and their contents, as his own for ever. I daresay the Duchess wrote me a kind little letter, forcing herself to express a vague hope that I would come again "some other time." I daresay Lady Rodfitten did NOT write reminding me of my promise to lunch on Friday and bring "Ariel Returns to Mayfair" with me. I left that manuscript at Ryder Street; in my bedroom grate; a shuffle of ashes. Not that I'd yet given up all thought of writing. But I certainly wasn't going to write now about the two things I most needed to forget. I wasn't going to write about the British aristocracy, nor about any kind of supernatural presence.... I did write a novel—my last—while I was at Vaule. "Mr. and Mrs. Robinson." Did you ever come across a copy of it?'

I nodded gravely.

'Ah; I wasn't sure,' said Maltby, 'whether it was ever published. A dreary affair, wasn't it? I knew a great deal about suburban life. But—well, I suppose one can't really understand what one doesn't love, and one can't make good fun without real understanding. Besides, what chance of virtue is there for a book written merely to distract the author's mind? I had hoped to be healed by sea and sunshine and solitude. These things were useless. The labour of "Mr. and Mrs. Robinson" did help, a little. When I had finished it, I thought I might as well send it off to my publisher. He had given me a large sum of money, down, after "Ariel," for my next book—so large that I was rather loth to disgorge. In the note I sent with the manuscript, I gave no address, and asked that the proofs should be read in the office. I didn't care whether the thing were published or not. I knew it would be a dead failure if it were. What mattered one more drop in the foaming cup of my humiliation? I knew Braxton would grin and gloat. I didn't mind even that.'

Seven Men

'Oh, well,' I said, 'Braxton was in no mood for grinning and gloating. "The Drones" had already appeared.'

Maltby had never heard of 'The Drones'—which I myself had remembered only in the course of his disclosures. I explained to him that it was Braxton's second novel, and was by way of being a savage indictment of the British aristocracy; that it was written in the worst possible taste, but was so very dull that it fell utterly flat; that Braxton had forthwith taken, with all of what Maltby had called 'the passionate force and intensity of his nature,' to drink, and had presently gone under and not re-emerged.

Maltby gave signs of genuine, though not deep, emotion, and cited two or three of the finest passages from 'A Faun on the Cotswolds.' He even expressed a conviction that 'The Drones' must have been misjudged. He said he blamed himself more than ever for yielding to that bad impulse at that Soiree.

'And yet,' he mused, 'and yet, honestly, I can't find it in my heart to regret that I did yield. I can only wish that all had turned out as well, in the end, for Braxton as for me. I wish he could have won out, as I did, into a great and lasting felicity. For about a year after I had finished "Mr. and Mrs. Robinson" I wandered from place to place, trying to kill memory, shunning all places frequented by the English. At last I found myself in Lucca. Here, if anywhere, I thought, might a bruised and tormented spirit find gradual peace. I determined to move out of my hotel into some permanent lodging. Not for felicity, not for any complete restoration of self-respect, was I hoping; only for peace. A "mezzano" conducted me to a noble and ancient house, of which, he told me, the owner was anxious to let the first floor. It was in much disrepair, but even so seemed to me very cheap. According to the simple Luccan standard, I am rich. I took that first floor for a year, had it repaired, and engaged two servants. My "padrona" inhabited the ground floor. From time to time she allowed me to visit her there. She was the Contessa Adriano-Rizzoli, the last of her line. She is the Contessa Adriano-Rizzoli-Maltby. We have been married fifteen years.'

Maltby looked at his watch. He rose and took tenderly from the table his great bunch of roses. 'She is a lineal descendant,' he said, 'of the Emperor Hadrian.'

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

I like to remember that I was the first to call him so, for, though he always deprecated the nickname, in his heart he was pleased by it, I know, and encouraged to go on.

Quite apart from its significance, he had reason to welcome it. He had been unfortunate at the font. His parents, at the time of his birth, lived in Ladbroke Crescent, XV. They must have been an extraordinarily unimaginative couple, for they could think of no better name for their child than Ladbroke. This was all very well for him till he went to school. But you can fancy the indignation and delight of us boys at finding among us a newcomer who, on his own confession, had been named after a Crescent. I don't know how it is nowadays, but thirty-five years ago, certainly, schoolboys regarded the possession of ANY Christian name as rather unmanly. As we all had these encumbrances, we had to wreak our scorn on any one who was cumbered in a queer fashion. I myself, bearer of a Christian name adjudged eccentric though brief, had had much to put up with in my first term. Brown's arrival, therefore, at the beginning of my second term, was a good thing for me, and I am afraid I was very prominent among his persecutors. Trafalgar Brown, Tottenham Court Brown, Bond Brown—what names did we little brutes NOT cull for him from the London Directory? Except how miserable we made his life, I do not remember much about him as he was at that time, and the only important part of the little else that I do recall is that already he showed a strong sense for literature. For the majority of us Carthusians, literature was bounded on the north by Whyte Melville, on the south by Hawley Smart, on the east by the former, and on the west by the latter. Little Brown used to read Harrison Ainsworth, Wilkie Collins, and other writers whom we, had we assayed them, would have dismissed as `deep.' It has been said by Mr. Arthur Symonds that `all art is a mode of escape.' The art of letters did not, however, enable Brown to escape so far from us as he would have wished. In my third term he did not reappear among us. His parents had in some sort atoned. Unimaginative though they were, it seems they could understand a tale of woe laid before them circumstantially, and had engaged a private tutor for their boy. Fifteen years elapsed before I saw him again.

This was at the second night of some play. I was dramatic critic for the Saturday Review, and, weary of meeting the same lot of people over and over again at first nights, had recently sent a circular to the managers asking that I might have seats for second nights instead. I found that there existed as distinct and invariable a lot of second-nighters as of first-nighters. The second-nighters were less `showy'; but then, they came rather to see than to be seen, and there was an air, that I liked, of earnestness and hopefulness about them. I used to write a great deal about the future of the British drama, and they, for their part, used to think and talk a great deal about it. People who care about books and pictures find much to interest and please them in the present. It is only the students of the theatre who always fall back, or rather forward, on the future. Though second-nighters do come to see, they remain rather to hope and pray. I should have known anywhere, by the visionary look in his eyes, that Brown was a confirmed second-nighter.

What surprises me is that I knew he was Brown. It is true that he had not grown much in those fifteen years: his brow was still disproportionate to his body, and he looked young to have become `confirmed' in any habit. But it is also true that not once in the past ten years, at any rate, had he flitted through my mind and poised on my conscience.

I hope that I and those other boys had long ago ceased from recurring to him in nightmares. Cordial though the hand was that I offered him, and highly civilised my whole demeanour, he seemed afraid that at any moment I might begin to dance around him, shooting out my lips at him and calling him Seven-Sisters Brown or something of that kind. It was only after constant meetings at second nights, and innumerable entr'acte talks about the future of the drama, that he began to trust me. In course of time we formed the habit of walking home together as far as Cumberland Place, at which point our ways diverged. I gathered that he was still living with his parents, but he did not tell me where, for they had not, as I learned by reference to the Red Book, moved from Ladbroke Crescent.

I found his company restful rather than inspiring. His days were spent in clerkship at one of the smaller Government Offices, his evenings—except when there was a second night—in reading and writing. He did not

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seem to know much, or to wish to know more, about life. Books and plays, first editions and second nights, were what he cared for. On matters of religion and ethics he was as little keen as he seemed to be on human character in the raw; so that (though I had already suspected him of writing, or meaning to write, a play) my eyebrows did rise when he told me he meant to write a play about Savonarola.

He made me understand, however, that it was rather the name than the man that had first attracted him. He said that the name was in itself a great incentive to blank-verse. He uttered it to me slowly, in a voice so much deeper than his usual voice, that I nearly laughed. For the actual bearer of the name he had no hero-worship, and said it was by a mere accident that he had chosen him as central figure. He had thought of writing a tragedy about Sardanapalus; but the volume of the "Encyclopedia Britannica" in which he was going to look up the main facts about Sardanapalus happened to open at Savonarola. Hence a sudden and complete peripety in the student's mind. He told me he had read the Encyclopedia's article carefully, and had dipped into one or two of the books there mentioned as authorities. He seemed almost to wish he hadn't. 'Facts get in one's way so,' he complained. 'History is one thing, drama is another. Aristotle said drama was more philosophic than history because it showed us what men WOULD do, not just what they DID. I think that's so true, don't you? I want to show what Savonarola WOULD have done if—' He paused.

'If what?'

'Well, that's just the point. I haven't settled that yet. When I've thought of a plot, I shall go straight ahead.'

I said I supposed he intended his tragedy rather for the study than for the stage. This seemed to hurt him. I told him that what I meant was that managers always shied at anything without 'a strong feminine interest.' This seemed to worry him. I advised him not to think about managers. He promised that he would think only about Savonarola.

I know now that this promise was not exactly kept by him; and he may have felt slightly awkward when, some weeks later, he told me he had begun the play. 'I've hit on an initial idea,' he said, 'and that's enough to start with. I gave up my notion of inventing a plot in advance. I thought it would be a mistake. I don't want puppets on wires. I want Savonarola to work out his destiny in his own way. Now that I have the initial idea, what I've got to do is to make Savonarola LIVE. I hope I shall be able to do this. Once he's alive, I shan't interfere with him. I shall just watch him. Won't it be interesting? He isn't alive yet. But there's plenty of time. You see, he doesn't come on at the rise of the curtain. A Friar and a Sacristan come on and talk about him. By the time they've finished, perhaps he'll be alive. But they won't have finished yet. Not that they're going to say very much. But I write slowly.'

I remember the mild thrill I had when, one evening, he took me aside and said in an undertone, 'Savonarola has come on. Alive!' For me the MS. hereinafter printed has an interest that for you it cannot have, so a-bristle am I with memories of the meetings I had with its author throughout the nine years he took over it. He never saw me without reporting progress, or lack of progress. Just what was going on, or standing still, he did not divulge. After the entry of Savonarola, he never told me what characters were appearing. 'All sorts of people appear,' he would say rather helplessly. 'They insist. I can't prevent them.' I used to say it must be great fun to be a creative artist; but at this he always shook his head: 'I don't create. THEY do. Savonarola especially, of course. I just look on and record. I never know what's going to happen next.' He had the advantage of me in knowing at any rate what had happened last. But whenever I pled for a glimpse he would again shake his head:

'The thing MUST be judged as a whole. Wait till I've come to the end of the Fifth Act.'

So impatient did I become that, as the years went by, I used rather to resent his presence at second nights. I felt he ought to be at his desk. His, I used to tell him, was the only drama whose future ought to concern him now. And in point of fact he had, I think, lost the true spirit of the second-nighter, and came rather to be seen than to see. He liked the knowledge that here and there in the auditorium, when he entered it, some one would be saying 'Who is that?' and receiving the answer 'Oh, don't you know? That's "Savonarola" Brown.' This sort of thing, however, did not make him cease to be the modest, unaffected fellow I had known. He always listened to the advice I used to offer him, though inwardly he must have chafed at it. Myself a fidgety and uninspired person, unable to begin a piece of writing before I know just how it shall end, I had always been afraid that sooner or later Brown would take some turning that led nowhither— would lose himself and come to grief. This fear crept into my gladness when, one evening in the spring of 1909, he told me he had finished the Fourth Act. Would he win out safely through the Fifth?

He himself was looking rather glum; and, as we walked away from the theatre, I said to him, 'I suppose you

Seven Men

feel rather like Thackeray when he'd "killed the Colonel": you've got to kill the Monk.'

'Not quite that,' he answered. 'But of course he'll die very soon now. A couple of years or so. And it does seem rather sad. It's not merely that he's so full of life. He has been becoming much more HUMAN lately. At first I only respected him. Now I have a real affection for him.'

This was an interesting glimpse at last, but I turned from it to my besetting fear.

'Haven't you,' I asked, 'any notion of HOW he is to die?'

Brown shook his head.

'But in a tragedy,' I insisted, 'the catastrophe MUST be led up to, step by step. My dear Brown, the end of the hero MUST be logical and rational.'

'I don't see that,' he said, as we crossed Piccadilly Circus. 'In actual life it isn't so. What is there to prevent a motor-omnibus from knocking me over and killing me at this moment?'

At that moment, by what has always seemed to me the strangest of coincidences, and just the sort of thing that playwrights ought to avoid, a motor-omnibus knocked Brown over and killed him.

He had, as I afterwards learned, made a will in which he appointed me his literary executor. Thus passed into my hands the unfinished play by whose name he had become known to so many people.

I hate to say that I was disappointed in it, but I had better confess quite frankly that, on the whole, I was. Had Brown written it quickly and read it to me soon after our first talk about it, it might in some ways have exceeded my hopes. But he had become for me, by reason of that quiet and unshaking devotion to his work while the years came and went, a sort of hero; and the very mystery involving just what he was about had addicted me to those ideas of magnificence which the unknown is said always to foster.

Even so, however, I am not blind to the great merits of the play as it stands. It is well that the writer of poetic drama should be a dramatist and a poet. Here is a play that abounds in striking situations, and I have searched it vainly for one line that does not scan. What I nowhere feel is that I have not elsewhere been thrilled or lulled by the same kind of thing. I do not go so far as to say that Brown inherited his parents' deplorable lack of imagination. But I do wish he had been less sensitive than he was to impressions, or else had seen and read fewer poetic dramas ancient and modern. Remembering that visionary look in his eyes, remembering that he was as displeased as I by the work of all living playwrights, and as dissatisfied with the great efforts of the Elizabethans, I wonder that he was not more immune from influences.

Also, I cannot but wish still that he had faltered in his decision to make no scenario. There is much to be said for the theory that a dramatist should first vitalise his characters and then leave them unfettered ; but I do feel that Brown's misused the confidence he reposed in them. The labour of so many years has somewhat the air of being a mere improvisation. Savonarola himself, after the First Act or so, strikes me as utterly inconsistent. It may be that he is just complex, like Hamlet. He does in the Fourth Act show traces of that Prince. I suppose this is why he struck Brown as having become 'more human.' To me he seems merely a poorer creature.

But enough of these reservations. In my anxiety for poor Brown's sake that you should not be disappointed, perhaps I have been carrying tactfulness too far and prejudicing you against that for which I specially want your favour. Here, without more ado, is

SAVONAROLA

A TRAGEDY

BY

L. BROWN

ACT I

SCENE: A Room in the Monastery of San Marco, Florence.

TIME: 1490, A.D. A summer morning.

'SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

Enter the SACRISTAN and a FRIAR.

SACR.

Savonarola looks more grim to-day
Than ever. Should I speak my mind, I'd say
That he was fashioning some new great scourge
To flay the backs of men.

FRI.

'Tis even so.

Brother Filippo saw him stand last night
In solitary vigil till the dawn
Lept o'er the Arno, and his face was such
As men may wear in Purgatory—nay,
E'en in the inmost core of Hell's own fires.

SACR.

I often wonder if some woman's face,
Seen at some rout in his old worldling days,
Haunts him e'en now, e'en here, and urges him
To fierier fury 'gainst the Florentines.

FRI.

Savonarola love-sick! Ha, ha, ha!
Love-sick? He, love-sick? 'Tis a goodly jest!
The CONFIRM'd misogyn a ladies' man!
Thou must have eaten of some strange red herb
That takes the reason captive. I will swear
Savonarola never yet hath seen
A woman but he spurn'd her. Hist! He comes.

[Enter SAVONAROLA, rapt in thought.]

Give thee good morrow, Brother.

Seven Men

SACR.

And therewith
A multitude of morrows equal—good
Till thou, by Heaven's grace, hast wrought the work
Nearest thine heart.

SAV.

I thank thee, Brother, yet
I thank thee not, for that my thankfulness
(An such there be) gives thanks to Heaven alone.

FRI. [To SACR.]

'Tis a right answer he hath given thee.
Had Sav'narola spoken less than thus,
Methinks me, the less Sav'narola he.
As when the snow lies on yon Apennines,
White as the hem of Mary Mother's robe,
And insusceptible to the sun's rays,
Being harder to the touch than temper'd steel,
E'en so this great gaunt monk white—visaged
Upstands to Heaven and to Heav'n devotes
The scarped thoughts that crown the upper slopes
Of his abrupt and AUStere nature.

SACR.

Aye.

[Enter LUCREZIA BORGIA, ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, and LEONARDO DA VINCI. LUC. is thickly veiled.]

ST. FRAN.

This is the place.

LUC. [Pointing at SAV.]

And this the man! [Aside.] And I—
By the hot blood that courses i' my veins
I swear it ineluctably—the woman!

Seven Men

SAV.

Who is this wanton?

[LUC. throws back her hood, revealing her face. SAV. starts back, gazing at her.]

ST. FRAN.

Hush, Sir! 'Tis my little sister
The poisoner, right well-belov'd by all
Whom she as yet hath spared. Hither she came
Mounted upon another little sister of mine—
A mare, caparison'd in goodly wise.
She—I refer now to Lucrezia—
Desireth to have word of thee anent
Some matter that befrets her.

SAV. [To LUC.]

Hence! Begone!
Savonarola will not tempted be
By face of woman e'en tho' 't be, tho' 'tis,
Surpassing fair. All hope abandon therefore.
I charge thee: Vade retro, Satanas.

LEONARDO

Sirrah, thou speakst in haste, as is the way
Of monkish men. The beauty of Lucrezia
Commends, not discommends, her to the eyes
Of keener thinkers than I take thee for.
I am an artist and an engineer,
Giv'n o'er to subtile dreams of what shall be
On this our planet. I foresee a day
When men shall skim the earth i' certain chairs
Not drawn by horses but sped on by oil
Or other matter, and shall thread the sky
Birdlike.

LUC.

It may be as thou sayest, friend,
Or may be not. [To SAV.] As touching this our errand,
I crave of thee, Sir Monk, an audience
Instanter.

Seven Men

FRI.

Lo! Here Alighieri comes.
I had methought me he was still at Parma.

[Enter DANTE.]

ST. FRAN. [To DAN.]
How fares my little sister Beatrice?

DAN.
She died, alack, last sennight.

ST. FRAN.
Did she so?
If the condolences of men avail
Thee aught, take mine.

DAN.
They are of no avail.

SAV. [To LUC.]
I do refuse thee audience.

LUC.
Then why
Didst thou not say so promptly when I ask'd it?

SAV.
Full well thou knowst that I was interrupted
By Alighieri's entry.
[Noise without. Enter Guelfs and Ghibellines fighting.]
What is this?

Seven Men

LUC.

I did not think that in this cloister'd spot
There would be so much doing. I had look'd
To find Savonarola all alone
And tempt him in his uneventful cell.
Instead o' which—Spurn'd am I? I am I.
There was a time, Sir, look to 't! O damnation!
What is 't? Anon then! These my toys, my gauds,
That in the cradle—aye, 't my mother's breast—
I puled and lisped at,—'Tis impossible,
Tho', faith, 'tis not so, forasmuch as 'tis.
And I a daughter of the Borgias!—
Or so they told me. Liars! Flatterers!
Currying lick-spoons! Where's the Hell of 't then?
'Tis time that I were going. Farewell, Monk,
But I'll avenge me ere the sun has sunk.
[Exeunt LUC., ST. FRAN., and LEONARDO, followed by DAN. SAV., having
watched LUC. out of sight, sinks to his knees, sobbing. FRI. and SACR.
watch him in amazement. Guelfs and Ghibellines continue fighting as
the Curtain falls.]

ACT II

TIME: Afternoon of same day.

SCENE: Lucrezia's Laboratory. Retorts, test-tubes, etc. On small
Renaissance table, up c., is a great poison-bowl, the contents of
which are being stirred by the FIRST APPRENTICE. The SECOND APPRENTICE
stands by, watching him.

SECOND APP.

For whom is the brew destin'd?

FIRST APP.

I know not.

Lady Lucrezia did but lay on me
Injunctions as regards the making of 't,
The which I have obey'd. It is compounded
Of a malignant and a deadly weed
Found not save in the Gulf of Spezia,
And one small phial of 't, I am advis'd,

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

Were more than 'nough to slay a regiment
Of Messer Malatesta's condottieri
In all their armour.

SECOND APP.

I can well believe it.
Mark how the purple bubbles froth upon
The evil surface of its nether slime!

[Enter LUC.]

LUC. [To FIRST APP.]
Is 't done, Sir Sluggard?

FIRST APP.

Madam, to a turn.

LUC.

Had it not been so, I with mine own hand
Would have outpour'd it down thy gullet, knave.
See, here's a ring of cunningly-wrought gold

That I, on a dark night, did purchase from
A goldsmith on the Ponte Vecchio.
Small was his shop, and hoar of visage he.
I did remark that from the ceiling's beams
Spiders had spun their webs for many a year,
The which hung erst like swathes of gossamer
Seen in the shadows of a fairy glade,
But now most woefully were weighted o'er
With gather'd dust. Look well now at the ring!
Touch'd here, behold, it opes a cavity
Capacious of three drops of yon fell stuff.
Dost heed? Whoso then puts it on his finger
Dies, and his soul is from his body rapt
To Hell or Heaven as the case may be.
Take thou this toy and pour the three drops in.

Seven Men

[Hands ring to FIRST APP. and comes down c.]

So, Sav'narola, thou shalt learn that I
Utter no threats but I do make them good.
Ere this day's sun hath wester'd from the view
Thou art to preach from out the Loggia
Dei Lanzi to the cits in the Piazza.
I, thy Lucrezia, will be upon the steps
To offer thee with phrases seeming-fair
That which shall seal thine eloquence for ever.
O mighty lips that held the world in spell
But would not meet these little lips of mine
In the sweet way that lovers use—O thin,
Cold, tight-drawn, bloodless lips, which nathless I
Deem of all lips the most magnificent
In this our city—

[Enter the Borgias' FOOL.]

Well, Fool, what's thy latest?

FOOL

Aristotle's or Zeno's, Lady—'tis neither latest nor last. For,
marry, if the cobbler stuck to his last, then were his latest his last
in rebus ambulatibus. Argal, I stick at nothing but cobble-stones,
which, by the same token, are stuck to the road by men's fingers.

LUC.

How many crows may nest in a grocer's jerkin?

FOOL

A full dozen at cock-crow, and something less under the dog-star, by
reason of the dew, which lies heavy on men taken by the scurvy.

LUC. [To FIRST APP.]

Methinks the Fool is a fool.

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

FOOL

And therefore, by auricular deduction, am I own twin to the Lady Lucrezia!

[Sings.]

When pears hang green on the garden wall
With a nid, and a nod, and a niddy–niddy–o
Then prank you, lads and lasses all,
With a yea and a nay and a niddy–o.

But when the thrush flies out o' the frost
With a nid, [etc.]
'Tis time for loons to count the cost,
With a yea [etc.]

[Enter the PORTER.]

PORTER

O my dear Mistress, there is one below
Demanding to have instant word of thee.
I told him that your Ladyship was not
At home. Vain perjury! He would not take
Nay for an answer.

LUC.

Ah? What manner of man
Is he?

PORTER

A personage the like of whom
Is wholly unfamiliar to my gaze.
Cowl'd is he, but I saw his great eyes glare
From their deep sockets in such wise as leopards
Glare from their caverns, crouching ere they spring

'SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

On their reluctant prey.

LUC.

And what name gave he?

PORTER [After a pause.]
Something—arola.

LUC.

Savon—? [PORTER nods.] Show him up. [Exit PORTER.]

FOOL

If he be right astronomically, Mistress, then is he the greater dunce
in respect of true learning, the which goes by the globe. Argal,
'twere better he widened his wind—pipe.

[Sings.]

Fly home, sweet self,
Nothing's for weeping,
Hemp was not made
For lovers' keeping, Lovers' keeping,
Cheerly, cheerly, fly away.
Hew no more wood
While ash is glowing,
The longest grass
Is lovers' mowing,
Lovers' mowing,
Cheerly, [etc.]

[Re—enter PORTER, followed by SAV. Exeunt PORTER, FOOL, and FIRST and
SECOND APPS.]

SAV.

I am no more a monk, I am a man
O' the world.
[Throws off cowl and frock, and stands forth in the costume of a
Renaissance nobleman. LUCREZIA looks him up and down.]

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

LUC.
Thou cutst a sorry figure.

SAV.
That
Is neither here nor there. I love you, Madam.

LUC.
And this, methinks, is neither there nor here,
For that my love of thee hath vanished,
Seeing thee thus beprankt. Go pad thy calves!
Thus mightst thou, just conceivably, with luck,
Capture the fancy of some serving-wench.

SAV.
And this is all thou hast to say to me?

LUC.
It is.

SAV.
I am dismiss'd?

LUC.
Thou art.

SAV.
'Tis well.
[Resumes frock and cowl.]
Savonarola is himself once more.

LUC.

Seven Men

And all my love for him returns to me
A thousandfold!

SAV.

Too late! My pride of manhood
Is wounded irremediably. I'll
To the Piazza, where my flock awaits me.
Thus do we see that men make great mistakes
But may amend them when the conscience wakes.
[Exit.]

LUC.

I'm half avenged now, but only half:
'Tis with the ring I'll have the final laugh!
Tho' love be sweet, revenge is sweeter far.
To the Piazza! Ha, ha, ha, ha, har!
[Seizes ring, and exit. Through open door are heard, as the Curtain
falls, sounds of a terrific hubbub in the Piazza.]

ACT III

SCENE: The Piazza.

TIME: A few minutes anterior to close of preceding Act.

The Piazza is filled from end to end with a vast seething crowd that is drawn entirely from the lower orders. There is a sprinkling of wild-eyed and dishevelled women in it. The men are lantern-jawed, with several days' growth of beard. Most of them carry rude weapons—staves, bill-hooks, crow-bars, and the like—and are in as excited a condition as the women. Some of them are bare-headed, others affect a kind of Phrygian cap. Cobblers predominate.

Enter LORENZO DE MEDICI and COSIMO DE MEDICI. They wear cloaks of scarlet brocade, and, to avoid notice, hold masks to their faces.

COS.

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

What purpose doth the foul and greasy plebs
Ensure to-day here?

LOR.

I nor know nor care.

COS.

How thrall'd thou art to the philosophy
Of Epicurus! Naught that's human I
Deem alien from myself. [To a COBBLER.] Make answer, fellow!
What empty hope hath drawn thee by a thread
Forth from the OBscene hovel where thou starvest?

COB.

No empty hope, your Honour, but the full
Assurance that to-day, as yesterday,
Savonarola will let loose his thunder
Against the vices of the idle rich
And from the brimming cornucopia
Of his immense vocabulary pour
Scorn on the lamentable heresies
Of the New Learning and on all the art
Later than Giotto.

COS.

Mark how absolute
The knave is!

LOR.

Then are parrots rational
When they regurgitate the thing they hear!
This fool is but an unit of the crowd,
And crowds are senseless as the vasty deep
That sinks or surges as the moon dictates.
I know these crowds, and know that any man
That hath a glib tongue and a rolling eye
Can as he willeth with them.
[Removes his mask and mounts steps of Loggia.]
Citizens!
[Prolonged yells and groans from the crowd.]
Yes, I am he, I am that same Lorenzo

Seven Men

Whom you have nicknamed the Magnificent.

[Further terrific yells, shakings of fists, brandishings of bill-hooks, insistent cries of `Death to Lorenzo!' `Down with the Magnificent!' Cobblers on fringe of crowd, down c., exhibit especially all the symptoms of epilepsy, whooping-cough, and other ailments.]

You love not me.

[The crowd makes an ugly rush. LOR. appears likely to be dragged down and torn limb from limb, but raises one hand in nick of time, and continues:]

Yet I deserve your love.

[The yells are now variegated with dubious murmurs. A cobbler down c. thrusts his face feverishly in the face of another and repeats, in a hoarse interrogative whisper, `Deserves our love?']

Not for the sundry boons I have bestow'd
And benefactions I have lavished
Upon Firenze, City of the Flowers,
But for the love that in this rugged breast
I bear you.

[The yells have now died away, and there is a sharp fall in dubious murmurs. The cobbler down c. says, in an ear-piercing whisper, `The love he bears us,' drops his lower jaw, nods his head repeatedly, and awaits in an intolerable state of suspense the orator's next words.]

I am not a blameless man,

[Some dubious murmurs.]

Yet for that I have lov'd you passing much,
Shall some things be forgiven me.

[Noises of cordial assent.]

There dwells

In this our city, known unto you all,
A man more virtuous than I am, and
A thousand times more intellectual;
Yet envy not I him, for—shall I name him?—
He loves not you. His name? I will not cut
Your hearts by speaking it. Here let it stay
On tip o' tongue.

[Insistent clamour.]

Then steel you to the shock!—

Savonarola.

[For a moment or so the crowd reels silently under the shock. Cobbler down c. is the first to recover himself and cry `Death to Savonarola!' The cry instantly becomes general. LOR. holds up his hand and gradually imposes silence.]

His twin bug-bears are
Yourselves and that New Learning which I hold
Less dear than only you.

[Profound sensation. Everybody whispers `Than only you' to everybody else. A woman near steps of Loggia attempts to kiss hem of LOR.'s garment.]

Would you but con

With me the old philosophers of Hellas,
Her fervent bards and calm historians,

Seven Men

You would arise and say `We will not hear
Another word against them!'

[The crowd already says this, repeatedly, with great emphasis.]

Take the Dialogues

Of Plato, for example. You will find

A spirit far more truly Christian

In them than in the ravings of the sour-soul'd

Savonarola.

[Prolonged cries of `Death to the Sour-Souled Savonarola!' Several cobbles detach themselves from the crowd and rush away to read the Platonic Dialogues. Enter SAVONAROLA. The crowd, as he makes his way through it, gives up all further control of its feelings, and makes a noise for which even the best zoologists might not find a good comparison. The staves and bill-hooks wave like twigs in a storm. One would say that SAV. must have died a thousand deaths already. He is, however, unharmed and unruffled as he reaches the upper step of the Loggia. LOR. meanwhile has rejoined COS. in the Piazza.]

SAV.

Pax vobiscum, brothers!

[This does but exacerbate the crowd's frenzy.]

VOICE OF A COBBLER

Hear his false lips cry Peace when there is no
Peace!

SAV.

Are not you ashamed, O Florentines,

[Renewed yells, but also some symptoms of manly shame.]

That hearken'd to Lorenzo and now reel

Inebriate with the exuberance

Of his verbosity?

[The crowd makes an obvious effort to pull itself together.]

A man can fool

Some of the people all the time, and can

Fool all the people sometimes, but he cannot

Fool ALL the people ALL the time.

[Loud cheers. Several cobbles clap one another on the back. Cries of `Death to Lorenzo!' The meeting is now well in hand.]

To-day

I must adopt a somewhat novel course

In dealing with the awful wickedness

At present noticeable in this city.

I do so with reluctance. Hitherto

I have avoided personalities.

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

But now my sense of duty forces me
To a departure from my custom of
Naming no names. One name I must and shall
Name.

[All eyes are turned on LOR., who smiles uncomfortably.]

No, I do not mean Lorenzo. He

Is 'neath contempt.

[Loud and prolonged laughter, accompanied with hideous grimaces at LOR.
Exeunt LOR. and COS.]

I name a woman's name,

[The women in the crowd eye one another suspiciously.]

A name known to you all—four—syllabled,

Beginning with an L.

[Pause. Enter hurriedly LUC., carrying the ring. She stands,
unobserved by any one, on outskirts of crowd. SAV. utters the name:]

Lucrezia!

LUC. [With equal intensity.]

Savonarola!

[SAV. starts violently and stares in direction of her voice.]

Yes, I come, I come!

[Forces her way to steps of Loggia. The crowd is much bewildered, and
the cries of 'Death to Lucrezia Borgia!' are few and sporadic.]

Why didst thou call me?

[SAV. looks somewhat embarrassed.]

What is thy distress?

I see it all! The sanguinary mob
Clusters to rend thee! As the antler'd stag,
With fine eyes glazed from the too-long chase,
Turns to defy the foam-fleck'd pack, and thinks,
In his last moment, of some graceful hind
Seen once afar upon a mountain-top,
E'en so, Savonarola, didst thou think,
In thy most dire extremity, of me.
And here I am! Courage! The horrid hounds
Droop tail at sight of me and fawn away
Innocuous.

[The crowd does indeed seem to have fallen completely under the sway
of LUC.'s magnetism, and is evidently convinced that it had been about
to make an end of the monk.]

Take thou, and wear henceforth,

As a sure talisman 'gainst future perils,

This little, little ring.

[SAV. makes awkward gesture of refusal. Angry murmurs from the crowd.

Cries of 'Take thou the ring!' 'Churl!' 'Put it on!' etc.

Enter the Borgias' FOOL and stands unnoticed on fringe of crowd.]

I hoped you 'ld like it—

Neat but not gaudy. Is my taste at fault?

I'd so look'd forward to— [Sob.] No, I'm not crying,

'SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

But just a little hurt.

[Hardly a dry eye in the crowd. Also swayings and snarlings indicative that SAV.'s life is again not worth a moment's purchase. SAV. makes awkward gesture of acceptance, but just as he is about to put ring on finger, the FOOL touches his lute and sings:—]

Wear not the ring,
It hath an unkind sting,
 Ding, dong, ding.
Bide a minute,
There's poison in it,
 Poison in it,
 Ding—a-dong, dong, ding.

LUC.

 The fellow lies.

[The crowd is torn with conflicting opinions. Mingled cries of `Wear not the ring!' `The fellow lies!' `Bide a minute!' `Death to the Fool!' `Silence for the Fool!' `Ding—a-dong, dong, ding!' etc.]

FOOL [Sings.]
Wear not the ring,
For Death's a robber-king,
 Ding, [etc.]
There's no trinket
Is what you think it,
 What you think it,
 Ding—a-dong, [etc.]

[SAV. throws ring in LUC.'s face. Enter POPE JULIUS II, with Papal army.]

POPE

Arrest that man and woman!

[Re-enter Guelfs and Ghibellines fighting. SAV. and LUC. are arrested by Papal officers. Enter MICHAEL ANGELO. ANDREA DEL SARTO appears for a moment at a window. PIPPA passes. Brothers of the Misericordia go by, singing a Requiem for Francesca da Rimini. Enter BOCCACCIO, BENVENUTO CELLINI, and many others, making remarks highly characteristic of themselves but scarcely audible through the terrific thunderstorm which now bursts over Florence and is at its loudest and darkest crisis as the Curtain falls.]

Seven Men

ACT IV

TIME: Three hours later.

SCENE: A Dungeon on the ground-floor of the Palazzo Civico.

The stage is bisected from top to bottom by a wall, on one side of which is seen the interior of LUCREZIA'S cell, on the other that of SAVONAROLA'S.

Neither he nor she knows that the other is in the next cell. The audience, however, knows this.

Each cell (because of the width and height of the proscenium) is of more than the average Florentine size, but is bare even to the point of severity, its sole amenities being some straw, a hunk of bread, and a stone pitcher. The door of each is facing the audience. Dim-ish light.

LUCREZIA wears long and clanking chains on her wrists, as does also SAVONAROLA. Imprisonment has left its mark on both of them. SAVONAROLA'S hair has turned white. His whole aspect is that of a very old, old man. LUCREZIA looks no older than before, but has gone mad.

SAV.

Alas, how long ago this morning seems
This evening! A thousand thousand eons
Are scarce the measure of the gulf betwixt
My then and now. Methinks I must have been
Here since the dim creation of the world
And never in that interval have seen
The tremulous hawthorn burgeon in the brake,
Nor heard the hum o' bees, nor woven chains
Of buttercups on Mount Fiesole
What time the sap lept in the cypresses,
Imbuing with the friskfulness of Spring
Those melancholy trees. I do forget
The aspect of the sun. Yet I was born

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

A freeman, and the Saints of Heaven smiled
Down on my crib. What would my sire have said,
And what my dam, had anybody told them
The time would come when I should occupy
A felon's cell? O the disgrace of it
The scandal, the incredible come-down!
It masters me. I see i' my mind's eye
The public prints—`Sharp Sentence on a Monk.'
What then? I thought I was of sterner stuff
Than is affrighted by what people think.
Yet thought I so because 'twas thought of me,
And so 'twas thought of me because I had
A hawk-like profile and a baleful eye.
Lo! my soul's chin recedes, soft to the touch
As half-churn'd butter. Seeming hawk is dove,
And dove's a gaol-bird now. Fie out upon 't!

LUC.

How comes it? I am Empress Dowager
Of China—yet was never crown'd. This must
Be seen to.

[Quickly gathers some straw and weaves a crown, which she puts on.]

SAV.

O, what a degrading! O, what a degrading!
The great career I had mapp'd out for me—
Nipp'd i' the bud. What life, when I come out,
Awaits me? Why, the very Novices
And callow Postulants will draw aside
As I pass by, and say `That man hath done
Time!' And yet shall I wince? The worst of Time
Is not in having done it, but in doing 't.

LUC.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! Eleven billion pig-tails
Do tremble at my nod imperial,—
The which is as it should be.

SAV.

I have heard
That gaolers oft are willing to carouse
With them they watch o'er, and do sink at last
Into a drunken sleep, and then's the time

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

To snatch the keys and make a bid for freedom.

Gaoler! Ho, Gaoler!

[Sounds of lock being turned and bolts withdrawn. Enter the Borgias'

FOOL, in plain clothes, carrying bunch of keys.]

I have seen thy face

Before.

FOOL

I saved thy life this afternoon, Sir.

SAV.

Thou art the Borgias' Fool?

FOOL

Say rather, was.

Unfortunately I have been discharg'd

For my betrayal of Lucrezia,

So that I have to speak like other men—

Decasyllabically, and with sense.

An hour ago the gaoler of this dungeon

Died of an apoplexy. Hearing which,

I ask'd for and obtain'd his billet.

SAV.

Fetch

A stoup o' liquor for thyself and me.

[Exit GAOLER.]

Freedom! there's nothing that thy votaries

Grudge in the cause of thee. That decent man

Is doom'd by me to lose his place again

To-morrow morning when he wakes from out

His hoggish slumber. Yet I care not.

[Re-enter GAOLER with a leathern bottle and two glasses.]

Ho!

This is the stuff to warm our vitals, this

The panacea for all mortal ills

And sure elixir of eternal youth.

Drink, bonniman!

[GAOLER drains a glass and shows signs of instant intoxication. SAV.

claps him on shoulder and replenishes glass. GAOLER drinks again, lies

down on floor, and snores. SAV. snatches the bunch of keys, laughs

long but silently, and creeps out on tip-toe, leaving door ajar.

LUC. meanwhile has lain down on the straw in her cell, and fallen

Seven Men

asleep.

Noise of bolts being shot back, jangling of keys, grating of lock, and the door of LUC.'S cell flies open. SAV. takes two steps across the threshold, his arms outstretched and his upturned face transfigured with a great joy.]

How sweet the open air

Leaps to my nostrils! O the good brown earth

That yields once more to my elastic tread

And laves these feet with its remember'd dew!

[Takes a few more steps, still looking upwards.]

Free!—I am free! O naked arc of heaven,

Enspangled with innumerable—no,

Stars are not there. Yet neither are there clouds!

The thing looks like a ceiling! [Gazes downward.] And this thing

Looks like a floor. [Gazes around.] And that white bundle yonder

Looks curiously like Lucrezia.

[LUC. awakes at sound of her name, and sits up sane.]

There must be some mistake.

LUC. [Rises to her feet.]

There is indeed!

A pretty sort of prison I have come to,

In which a self-respecting lady's cell

Is treated as a lounge!

SAV.

I had no notion

You were in here. I thought I was out there.

I will explain—but first I'll make amends.

Here are the keys by which your durance ends.

The gate is somewhere in this corridor,

And so good-bye to this interior!

[Exeunt SAV. and LUC. Noise, a moment later, of a key grating in a lock, then of gate creaking on its hinges; triumphant laughs of fugitives; loud slamming of gate behind them.]

In SAV.'s cell the GAOLER starts in his sleep, turns his face to the wall, and snores more than ever deeply. Through open door comes a cloaked figure.]

CLOAKED FIGURE

Sleep on, Savonarola, and awake

Not in this dungeon but in ruby Hell!

[Stabs Gaoler, whose snores cease abruptly. Enter POPE JULIUS II, with Papal retinue carrying torches. MURDERER steps quickly back into shadow.]

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

POPE [To body of GAOLER.]
Savonarola, I am come to taunt
Thee in thy misery and dire abjection.
Rise, Sir, and hear me out.

MURD. [Steps forward.]
Great Julius,
Waste not thy breath. Savonarola's dead.
I murder'd him.

POPE
Thou hadst no right to do so.
Who art thou, pray?

MURD.
Cesare Borgia,
Lucrezia's brother, and I claim a brother's
Right to assassinate whatever man
Shall wantonly and in cold blood reject
Her timid offer of a poison'd ring.

POPE
Of this anon.
[Stands over body of GAOLER.]
Our present business
Is general woe. No nobler corse hath ever
Impress'd the ground. O let the trumpets speak it!
[Flourish of trumpets.]
This was the noblest of the Florentines.
His character was flawless, and the world
Held not his parallel. O bear him hence
With all such honours as our State can offer.
He shall interred be with noise of cannon,
As doth befit so militant a nature.
Prepare these obsequies.
[Papal officers lift body of GAOLER.]

A PAPAL OFFICER

`SAVONAROLA' BROWN

Seven Men

But this is not
Savonarola. It is some one else.

CESARE

Lo! 'tis none other than the Fool that I
Hoof'd from my household but two hours ago.
I deem'd him no good riddance, for he had
The knack of setting tables on a roar.
What shadows we pursue! Good night, sweet Fool,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!

POPE

Interred shall he be with signal pomp.
No honour is too great that we can pay him.
He leaves the world a vacuum. Meanwhile,
Go we in chase of the accursed villain
That hath made escapado from this cell.
To horse! Away! We'll scour the country round
For Sav'narola till we hold him bound.
Then shall you see a cinder, not a man,
Beneath the lightnings of the Vatican!

[Flourish, alarums and excursions, flashes of Vatican lightning, roll of drums, etc. Through open door of cell is led in a large milk-white horse, which the POPE mounts as the Curtain falls.]

Remember, please, before you formulate your impressions, that saying of Brown's: 'The thing must be judged as a whole.' I like to think that whatever may seem amiss to us in these Four Acts of his would have been righted by collation with that Fifth which he did not live to achieve.

I like, too, to measure with my eyes the yawning gulf between stage and study. Very different from the message of cold print to our imagination are the messages of flesh and blood across footlights to our eyes and ears. In the warmth and brightness of a crowded theatre 'Savonarola' might, for aught one knows, seem perfect. 'Then why,' I hear my gentle readers asking, 'did you thrust the play on US, and not on a theatrical manager?'

That question has a false assumption in it. In the course of the past eight years I have thrust 'Savonarola' on any number of theatrical managers. They have all of them been (to use the technical phrase) 'very kind.' All have seen great merits in the work; and if I added together all the various merits thus seen I should have no doubt that 'Savonarola' was the best play never produced. The point on which all the managers are unanimous is that they have no use for a play without an ending. This is why I have fallen back, at last, on gentle readers, whom now I hear asking why I did not, as Brown's literary executor, try to finish the play myself. Can they never ask a question without a false assumption in it? I did try, hard, to finish 'Savonarola.'

Artistically, of course, the making of such an attempt was indefensible. Humanly, not so. It is clear throughout the play—especially perhaps in Acts III and IV—that if Brown had not steadfastly in his mind the hope of production on the stage, he had nothing in his mind at all. Horrified though he would have been by the idea of letting me kill his Monk, he would rather have done even this than doom his play to everlasting unactedness. I took, therefore, my courage in both hands, and made out a scenario....

Dawn on summit of Mount Fiesole. Outspread view of Florence (Duomo, Giotto's Tower, etc.) as seen from that eminence.—NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, asleep on grass, wakes as sun rises. Deplores his exile from Florence, LORENZO'S unappeasable hostility, etc. Wonders if he could not somehow secure the POPE'S favour. Very cynical. Breaks off: But who are these that scale the mountain-side? | Savonarola and Lucrezia | Borgia!—Enter through a trap-door, back c. [trap-door veiled from audience by a grassy ridge], SAV. and LUC.

Seven Men

Both gasping and footsore from their climb. [Still, with chains on their wrists? or not?]
—MACH. steps unobserved behind a cypress and listens.—SAV. has a speech to the rising sun—Th' effulgent hope that westers from the east | Daily. Says that his hope, on the contrary, lies in escape To that which easters not from out the west, | That fix'd abode of freedom which men call | America! Very bitter against POPE.—LUC. says that she, for her part, means To start afresh in that uncharted land | Which austers not from out the antipod, | Australia!—Exit MACH., unobserved, down trap-door behind ridge, to betray LUC. and SAV.—Several longish speeches by SAV. and LUC. Time is thus given for MACH. to get into touch with POPE, and time for POPE and retinue to reach the slope of Fiesole. SAV., glancing down across ridge, sees these sleuth-hounds, points them out to LUC. and cries Bewray'd! LUC. By whom? SAV. I know not, but suspect | The hand of that sleek serpent Niccolo | Machiavelli.—SAV. and LUC. rush down c., but find their way barred by the footlights.—LUC. We will not be ta'en Alive. And here availeth us my lore | In what pertains to poison. Yonder herb | [points to a herb growing down r.] Is deadly nightshade. Quick, Monk! Pluck we it !—SAV. and LUC. die just as POPE appears over ridge, followed by retinue in full cry.— POPE'S annoyance at being foiled is quickly swept away on the great wave of Shakespearean chivalry and charity that again rises in him. He gives SAV. a funeral oration similar to the one meant for him in Act IV, but even more laudatory and more stricken. Of LUC., too, he enumerates the virtues, and hints that the whole terrestrial globe shall be hollowed to receive her bones. Ends by saying: In deference to this our double sorrow | Sun shall not shine to-day nor shine tomorrow.—Sun drops quickly back behind eastern horizon, leaving a great darkness on which the Curtain slowly falls.

All this might be worse, yes. The skeleton passes muster. But in the attempt to incarnate and ensanguine it I failed wretchedly. I saw that Brown was, in comparison with me, a master. Thinking I might possibly fare better in his method of work than in my own, I threw the skeleton into a cupboard, sat down, and waited to see what Savonarola and those others would do.

They did absolutely nothing. I sat watching them, pen in hand, ready to record their slightest movement. Not a little finger did they raise. Yet I knew they must be alive. Brown had always told me they were quite independent of him. Absurd to suppose that by the accident of his own death they had ceased to breathe.... Now and then, overcome with weariness, I dozed at my desk, and whenever I woke I felt that these rigid creatures had been doing all sorts of wonderful things while my eyes were shut. I felt that they disliked me. I came to dislike them in return, and forbade them my room.

Some of you, my readers, might have better luck with them than I. Invite them, propitiate them, watch them! The writer of the best Fifth Act sent to me shall have his work tacked on to Brown's; and I suppose I could get him a free pass for the second night.