

ГЕРБЕРТ УЭЛЛС

BOON, THE MIND OF
THE RACE, THE WILD
ASSES OF THE DEVIL,
AND THE LAST TRUMP;

Герберт Джордж Уэллс
Boon, The Mind of the
Race, The Wild Asses of the
Devil, and The Last Trump;

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23146051

Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump; / Being a First Selection from the Literary Remains of George Boon, Appropriate to the Times:

Содержание

CHAPTER THE FIRST	6
CHAPTER THE SECOND	24
CHAPTER THE THIRD	36
CHAPTER THE FOURTH	51
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	55

**Herbert George Wells
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INTRODUCTION

Whenever a publisher gets a book by one author he wants an Introduction written to it by another, and Mr. Fisher Unwin is no exception to the rule. Nobody reads Introductions, they serve no useful purpose, and they give no pleasure, but they appeal to the business mind, I think, because as a rule they cost nothing. At any rate, by the pressure of a certain inseparable intimacy between Mr. Reginald Bliss and myself, this Introduction has been extracted from me. I will confess that I have not read his

book through, though I have a kind of first-hand knowledge of its contents, and that it seems to me an indiscreet, ill-advised book...

I have a very strong suspicion that this Introduction idea is designed to entangle me in the responsibility for the book. In America, at any rate, "The Life of George Meek, Bath Chairman," was ascribed to me upon no better evidence. Yet any one who likes may go to Eastbourne and find Meek with chair and all complete. But in view of the complications of the book market and the large simplicities of the public mind, I do hope that the reader – and by that I mean the reviewer – will be able to see the reasonableness and the necessity of distinguishing between me and Mr. Reginald Bliss. I do not wish to escape the penalties of thus participating in, and endorsing, his manifest breaches of good taste, literary decorum, and friendly obligation, but as a writer whose reputation is already too crowded and confused and who is for the ordinary purposes of every day known mainly as a novelist, I should be glad if I could escape the public identification I am now repudiating. Bliss is Bliss and Wells is Wells. And Bliss can write all sorts of things that Wells could not do.

This Introduction has really no more to say than that.

H. G. WELLS.

CHAPTER THE FIRST

The Back of Miss Bathwick and George Boon

§ 1

It is quite probable that the reader does not know of the death of George Boon, and that “remains” before his name upon the title-page will be greeted with a certain astonishment. In the ordinary course of things, before the explosion of the war, the death of George Boon would have been an event – oh! a three-quarters of a column or more in the *Times* event, and articles in the monthlies and reminiscences. As it is, he is not so much dead as missing. Something happened at the eleventh hour – I think it was chiefly the Admiralty report of the fight off the Falkland Islands – that blew his obituary notices clean out of the papers. And yet he was one of our most popular writers, and in America I am told he was in the “hundred thousand class.” But now we think only of Lord Kitchener’s hundred thousands.

It is no good pretending about it. The war has ended all that. Boon died with his age. After the war there will be a new sort of book-trade and a crop of new writers and a fresh tone, and

everything will be different. This is an obituary, of more than George Boon... I regard the outlook with profound dismay. I try to keep my mind off it by drilling with the Shrewsbury last line of volunteers and training down the excrescences of my physical style. When the war is over will be time enough to consider the prospects of a superannuated man of letters. We National Volunteers are now no mere soldiers on paper; we have fairly washable badges by way of uniform; we have bought ourselves dummy rifles; we have persuaded the War Office to give us a reluctant recognition on the distinct understanding that we have neither officers nor authority. In the event of an invasion, I understand, we are to mobilize and ... do quite a number of useful things. But until there is an invasion in actual progress, nothing is to be decided more precisely than what this whiff of printer's shrapnel, these four full stops, conveys...

§ 2

I must confess I was monstrously disappointed when at last I could get my hands into those barrels in the attic in which Boon had stored his secret writings. There was more perhaps than I had expected; I do not complain of the quantity, but of the disorder, the incompleteness, the want of discipline and forethought.

Boon had talked so often and so convincingly of these secret books he was writing, he had alluded so frequently to this or that great project, he would begin so airily with "In the

seventeenth chapter of my ‘Wild Asses of the Devil,’” or “I have been recasting the third part of our ‘Mind of the Race,’” that it came as an enormous shock to me to find there was no seventeenth chapter; there was not even a completed first chapter to the former work, and as for the latter, there seems nothing really finished or settled at all beyond the fragments I am now issuing, except a series of sketches of Lord Rosebery, for the most part in a toga and a wreath, engaged in a lettered retirement at his villa at Epsom, and labelled “Patrician Dignity, the Last Phase” – sketches I suppress as of no present interest – and a complete gallery of imaginary portraits (with several duplicates) of the Academic Committee that has done so much for British literature (the Polignac prize, for example, and Sir Henry Newbolt’s professorship) in the last four or five years. So incredulous was I that this was all, that I pushed my inquiries from their original field in the attic into other parts of the house, pushed them, indeed, to the very verge of ransacking, and in that I greatly deepened the want of sympathy already separating me from Mrs. Boon. But I was stung by a thwarted sense of duty, and quite resolved that no ill-advised interference should stand between me and the publication of what Boon has always represented to me as the most intimate productions of his mind.

Yet now the first rush of executorial emotion is over I can begin to doubt about Boon’s intention in making me his “literary executor.” Did he, after all, intend these pencilled scraps, these marginal caricatures, and – what seems to me

most objectionable – annotated letters from harmless prominent people for publication? Or was his selection of me his last effort to prolong what was, I think, if one of the slightest, one also of the most sustained interests of his life, and that was a prolonged faint jeering at my expense? Because always – it was never hidden from me – in his most earnest moments Boon jeered at me. I do not know why he jeered at me, it was always rather pointless jeering and far below his usual level, but jeer he did. Even while we talked most earnestly and brewed our most intoxicating draughts of project and conviction, there was always this scarce perceptible blossom and flavour of ridicule floating like a drowning sprig of blue borage in the cup. His was indeed essentially one of those suspended minds that float above the will and action; when at last reality could be evaded no longer it killed him; he never really believed nor felt the urgent need that goads my more accurate nature to believe and do. Always when I think of us together, I feel that I am on my legs and that he sits about. And yet he could tell me things I sought to know, prove what I sought to believe, shape beliefs to a conviction in me that I alone could never attain.

He took life as it came, let his fancy play upon it, selected, elucidated, ignored, threw the result in jest or observation or elaborate mystification at us, and would have no more of it... He would be earnest for a time and then break away. “The Last Trump” is quite typical of the way in which he would turn upon himself. It sets out so straight for magnificence; it breaks off so

abominably. You will read it.

Yet he took things more seriously than he seemed to do.

This war, I repeat, killed him. He could not escape it. It bore him down. He did his best to disregard it. But its worst stresses caught him in the climax of a struggle with a fit of pneumonia brought on by a freak of bathing by moonlight – in an English October, a thing he did to distract his mind from the tension after the Marne – and it destroyed him. The last news they told him was that the Germans had made their “shoot and scuttle” raid upon Whitby and Scarborough. There was much circumstantial description in the morning’s paper. They had smashed up a number of houses and killed some hundreds of people, chiefly women and children. Ten little children had been killed or mutilated in a bunch on their way to school, two old ladies at a boarding-house had had their legs smashed, and so on.

“Take this newspaper,” he said, and held it out to his nurse. “Take it,” he repeated irritably, and shook it at her.

He stared at it as it receded. Then he seemed to be staring at distant things.

“Wild Asses of the Devil,” he said at last. “Oh! Wild Asses of the Devil! I thought somehow it was a joke. It wasn’t a joke. There they are, and the world is theirs.”

And he turned his face to the wall and never spoke again.

§ 3

But before I go on it is necessary to explain that the George Boon I speak of is not exactly the same person as the George Boon, the Great Writer, whose fame has reached to every bookshop in the world. The same bodily presence perhaps they had, but that is all. Except when he chose to allude to them, those great works on which that great fame rests, those books and plays of his that have made him a household word in half a dozen continents, those books with their style as perfect and obvious as the gloss upon a new silk hat, with their flat narrative trajectory that nothing could turn aside, their unsubdued and apparently unsubduable healthy note, their unavoidable humour, and their robust pathos, never came between us. We talked perpetually of literature and creative projects, but never of that “output” of his. We talked as men must talk who talk at all, with an untrammelled freedom; now we were sublime and now curious, now we pursued subtleties and now we were utterly trivial, but always it was in an undisciplined, irregular style quite unsuitable for publication. That, indeed, was the whole effect of the George Boon I am now trying to convey, that he was indeed essentially not for publication. And this effect was in no degree diminished by the fact that the photograph of his beautiful castellated house, and of that extraordinarily irrelevant person Mrs. Boon – for I must speak my mind of her – and of her two dogs (Binkie and Chum),

whom he detested, were, so to speak, the poulet and salade in the menu of every illustrated magazine.

The fact of it is he was one of those people who will *not* photograph; so much of him was movement, gesture, expression, atmosphere, and colour, and so little of him was form. His was the exact converse of that semi-mineral physical quality that men call handsome, and now that his career has come to its sad truncation I see no reason why I should further conceal the secret of the clear, emphatic, solid impression he made upon all who had not met him. It was, indeed, a very simple secret; —

He never wrote anything for his public with his own hand.

He did this of set intention. He distrusted a certain freakishness of his finger-tips that he thought might have injured him with his multitudinous master. He knew his holograph manuscript would certainly get him into trouble. He employed a lady, the lady who figures in his will, Miss Bathwick, as his amanuensis. In Miss Bathwick was all his security. She was a large, cool, fresh-coloured, permanently young lady, full of serious enthusiasms; she had been faultlessly educated in a girls' high school of a not too modern type, and she regarded Boon with an invincible respect. She wrote down his sentences (spelling without blemish in all the European languages) as they came from his lips, with the aid of a bright, efficient, new-looking typewriter. If he used a rare word or a whimsical construction, she would say, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Boon," and he would at once correct it; and if by any lapse of an always rather too nimble

imagination he carried his thoughts into regions outside the tastes and interests of that enormous *ante-bellum* public it was his fortune to please, then, according to the nature of his divagation, she would either cough or sigh or – in certain eventualities – get up and leave the room.

By this ingenious device – if one may be permitted to use the expression for so pleasant and trustworthy an assistant – he did to a large extent free himself from the haunting dread of losing his public by some eccentricity of behaviour, some quirk of thought or fluctuation of “attitude” that has pursued him ever since the great success of “Captain Clayball,” a book he wrote to poke fun at the crude imaginings of a particularly stupid schoolboy he liked, had put him into the forefront of our literary world.

§ 4

He had a peculiar, and, I think, a groundless terror of the public of the United States of America, from which country he derived the larger moiety of his income. In spite of our remonstrances, he subscribed to the *New York Nation* to the very end, and he insisted, in spite of fact, reason, and my earnest entreaties (having regard to the future unification of the English-speaking race), in figuring that continental empire as a vain, garrulous, and prosperous female of uncertain age, and still more uncertain temper, with unfounded pretensions to intellectuality and an ideal of refinement of the most negative description,

entirely on the strength of that one sample. One might as well judge England by the *Spectator*. My protests seemed only to intensify his zest in his personification of Columbia as the Aunt Errant of Christendom, as a wild, sentimental, and advanced maiden lady of inconceivable courage and enterprise, whom everything might offend and nothing cow. "I know," he used to say, "something will be said or done and she'll have hysterics; the temptation to smuggle something through Miss Bathwick's back is getting almost too much for me. I *could*, you know. Or some one will come along with something a little harder and purer and emptier and more emphatically handsome than I can hope to do. I shall lose her one of these days... How can I hope to keep for ever that proud and fickle heart?"

And then I remember he suddenly went off at a tangent to sketch out a great novel he was to call "Aunt Columbia." "No," he said, "they would suspect that – 'Aunt Dove.'" She was to be a lady of great, unpremeditated wealth, living on a vast estate near a rather crowded and troublesome village. Everything she did and said affected the village enormously. She took the people's children into her employment; they lived on her surplus vegetables. She was to have a particularly troublesome and dishonest household of servants and a spoiled nephew called Teddy. And whenever she felt dull or energetic she drove down into the village and lectured and blamed the villagers – for being overcrowded, for being quarrelsome, for being poor and numerous, for not, in fact, being spinster ladies of enormous

good fortune... That was only the beginning of one of those vast schemes of his that have left no trace now in all the collection.

His fear of shocking America was, I think, unfounded; at any rate, he succeeded in the necessary suppressions every time, and until the day of his death it was rare for the American press-cuttings that were removed in basketfuls almost daily with the other debris of his breakfast-table to speak of him in anything but quasi-amorous tones. He died for them the most spiritual as well as the most intellectual of men; "not simply intellectual, but lovable." They spoke of his pensive eyes, though, indeed, when he was not glaring at a camera they were as pensive as champagne, and when the robust pathos bumped against the unavoidable humour as they were swept along the narrow torrent of his story they said with all the pleasure of an apt quotation that indeed in his wonderful heart laughter mingled with tears.

§ 5

I think George Boon did on the whole enjoy the remarkable setting of his philosophical detachment very keenly; the monstrous fame of him that rolled about the world, that set out east and came back circumferentially from the west and beat again upon his doors. He laughed irresponsibly, spent the resulting money with an intelligent generosity, and talked of other things. "It is the quality of life," he said, and "The people love to have it so."

I seem to see him still, hurrying but not dismayed, in flight from the camera of an intrusive admirer – an admirer not so much of him as of his popularity – up one of his garden walks towards his agreeable study. I recall his round, enigmatical face, an affair of rosy rotundities, his very bright, active eyes, his queer, wiry, black hair that went out to every point in the heavens, his ankles and neck and wrists all protruding from his garments in their own peculiar way, protruding a little more in the stress of flight. I recall, too, his general effect of careless and, on the whole, commendable dirtiness, accentuated rather than corrected by the vivid tie of soft orange-coloured silk he invariably wore, and how his light paces danced along the turf. (He affected in his private dominions trousers of faint drab corduroy that were always too short, braced up with vehement tightness, and displaying claret-coloured socks above his easy, square-toed shoes.) And I know that even that lumbering camera coming clumsily to its tripod ambush neither disgusted nor vulgarized him. He liked his game; he liked his success and the opulent stateliness it gave to the absurdities of Mrs. Boon and all the circumstances of his profoundly philosophical existence; and he liked it all none the worse because it was indeed nothing of himself at all, because he in his essence was to dull intelligences and commonplace minds a man invisible, a man who left no impression upon the camera-plate or moved by a hair's breadth the scale of a materialist balance.

§ 6

But I will confess the state of the remains did surprise and disappoint me.

His story of great literary enterprises, holograph and conducted in the profoundest secrecy, tallied so completely with, for example, certain reservations, withdrawals that took him out of one's company and gave him his evident best companionship, as it were, when he was alone. It was so entirely like him to concoct lengthy books away from his neatly ordered study, from the wise limitations of Miss Bathwick's significant cough and her still more significant back, that we all, I think, believed in these unseen volumes unquestioningly. While those fine romances, those large, bright plays, were being conceived in a publicity about as scandalous as a royal gestation, publicly planned and announced, developed, written, boomed, applauded, there was, we knew, this undercurrent of imaginative activity going on, concealed from Miss Bathwick's guardian knowledge, withdrawn from the stately rhythm of her keys. What more natural than to believe he was also writing it down?

Alas! I found nothing but fragments. The work upon which his present fame is founded was methodical, punctual and careful, and it progressed with a sort of inevitable precision from beginning to end, and so on to another beginning. Not only in tone and spirit but in length (that most important consideration)

he was absolutely trustworthy; his hundred thousand words of good, healthy, straightforward story came out in five months with a precision almost astronomical. In that sense he took his public very seriously. To have missed his morning's exercises behind Miss Bathwick's back would have seemed to him the most immoral – nay, worse, the most uncivil of proceedings.

“She wouldn't understand it,” he would say, and sigh and go.

But these scraps and fragments are of an irregularity diametrically contrasting with this. They seem to have been begun upon impulse at any time, and abandoned with an equal impulsiveness, and they are written upon stationery of a variety and nature that alone would condemn them in the eyes of an alienist. The handwriting is always atrocious and frequently illegible, the spelling is strange, and sometimes indecently bad, the punctuation is sporadic, and many of the fragments would be at once put out of court as modern literature by the fact that they are written in pencil on *both sides of the paper!* Such of the beginnings as achieve a qualified completeness are of impossible lengths; the longest is a piece – allowing for gaps – of fourteen thousand words, and another a fragment shaping at about eleven. These are, of course, quite impossible sizes, neither essay nor short story nor novel, and no editor or publisher would venture to annoy the public with writings of so bizarre a dimension. In addition there are fragments of verse. But I look in vain for anything beyond the first chapter of that tremendous serial, “The Wild Asses of the Devil,” that kept on day by day through June

and July to the very outbreak of the war, and only a first chapter and a few illustrations and memoranda and fragments for our "Mind of the Race," that went on intermittently for several years. Whole volumes of that great hotchpotch of criticism are lost in the sandbanks of my treacherous memory for ever.

Much of the matter, including a small MS. volume of those brief verses called Limericks (personal always, generally actionable, and frequently lacking in refinement), I set aside at an early date. Much else also I rejected as too disjointed and unfinished, or too eccentric. Two bizarre fragments called respectively "Jane in Heaven" and "An Account of a Play," I may perhaps find occasion to issue at a later date, and there were also several brief imitations of Villiers de l'Isle Adam quite alien to contemporary Anglo-Saxon taste, which also I hold over. Sometimes upon separate sheets, sometimes in the margins of other compositions, and frequently at the end of letters received by him I found a curious abundance of queer little drawings, caricatures of his correspondents, burlesque renderings of occurrences, disrespectful sidenotes to grave and pregnant utterances, and the like. If ever the correspondence of George Boon is published, it will have to be done in *fac-simile*. There is a considerable number of impressions of the back of Miss Bathwick's head, with and without the thread of velvet she sometimes wore about her neck, and quite a number of curiously idealized studies of that American reading public he would always so grotesquely and annoyingly insist on calling

“Her.” And among other things I found a rendering of myself as a short, flattened little object that has a touch of malignity in it I had no reason to expect. Few or none of these quaint comments are drawn with Indian ink upon millboard in a manner suitable for reproduction, and even were they so, I doubt whether the public would care for very many of them. (I give my own portrait – it is singularly unlike me – to show the style of thing he did.)

Of the “Mind of the Race” I may perhaps tell first. I find he had written out and greatly embellished the singularly vivid and detailed and happily quite imaginary account of the murder of that eminent litterateur, Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole, with which the “Mind of the Race” was to have concluded; and there are an extraordinarily offensive interview with Mr. Raymond Blathwayt (which, since it now “dates” so markedly, I have decided to suppress altogether) and an unfinished study of “the Literary Statesmen of the Transition Years from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Centuries” (including a lengthy comparison of the greatness of Lords Bryce and Morley, a eulogy of Lord Morley and a discussion whether he has wit or humour) that were new to me. And perhaps I may note at this point the twenty sixpenny washing books in which Boon had commenced what I am firmly convinced is a general index of the works of Plato and Aristotle. It is conceivable he did this merely as an aid to his private reading, though the idea of a popular romancer reading anything will come to the general reader with a little shock of surprise.

For my own part and having in memory his subtle and elusive

talk, I am rather inclined to think that at one time he did go so far as to contemplate a familiar and humorous commentary upon these two pillars of the world's thought. An edition of them edited and copiously illustrated by him would, I feel sure, have been a remarkable addition to any gentleman's library. If he did turn his mind to anything of the sort he speedily abandoned the idea again, and with this mention and the note that he detested Aristotle, those six and twenty washing books may very well follow the bulk of the drawings and most of the verse back into their original oblivion...

§ 7

But now you will begin to understand the nature of the task that lies before me. If I am to do any justice to the cryptic George Boon, if indeed I am to publish anything at all about him, I must set myself to edit and convey these books whose only publication was in fact by word of mouth in his garden arbours, using these few fragments as the merest accessories to that. I have hesitated, I have collected unfavourable advice, but at last I have resolved to make at least one experimental volume of Boon's remains. After all, whatever we have of Aristotle and Socrates and all that we most value of Johnson comes through the testimony of hearers. And though I cannot venture to compare myself with Boswell...

I know the dangers I shall run in this attempt to save my friend from the devastating expurgations of his written ostensible

career. I confess I cannot conceal from myself that, for example, I must needs show Boon, by the standards of every day, a little treacherous.

When I thrust an arm into one or other of the scores of densely packed bins of press cuttings that cumber the attics of his castellated mansion and extract a sample clutch, I find almost invariably praise, not judicious or intelligent praise perhaps, but slab and generous praise, paragraphs, advice, photographs, notices, notes, allusions and comparisons, praise of the unparalleled gloss on his style by Doctor Tomlinson Keyhole under the pseudonym of "Simon up to Snuff," praise of the healthiness of the tone by Doctor Tomlinson Keyhole under the pseudonym of "The Silver Fish," inspired announcements of some forthcoming venture made by Doctor Tomlinson Keyhole under the pseudonym of "The True-Born Englishman," and interesting and exalting speculations as to the precise figure of Boon's income over Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole's own signature; I find chatty, if a little incoherent, notices by Braybourne of the most friendly and helpful sort, and interviews of the most flattering description by this well-known litterateur and that. And I reflect that while all this was going on, there was Boon on the other side of Miss Bathwick's rampart mind, not only not taking them and himself seriously, not only not controlling his disrespectful internal commentary on these excellent men, but positively writing it down, regaling himself with the imagined murder of this leader of thought and the forcible abduction to

sinister and melancholy surroundings of that!

And yet I find it hard to do even this measure of justice to my friend. He was treacherous, it must be written, and yet he was, one must confess, a singularly attractive man. There was a certain quality in his life – it was pleasant. When I think of doing him justice I am at once dashed and consoled by the thought of how little he cared how I judged him. And I recall him very vividly as I came upon him on one occasion.

He is seated on a garden roller – an implement which makes a faultless outdoor seat when the handle is adjusted at a suitable angle against a tree, and one has taken the precaution to skid the apparatus with a piece of rockery or other convenient object. His back is against the handle, his legs lie in a boneless curve over the roller, and an inch or so of native buff shows between the corduroy trousers and the claret-coloured socks. He appears to be engaged partly in the degustation of an unappetizing lead pencil, and partly in the contemplation of a half-quire of notepaper. The expression of his rubicund face is distinctly a happy one. At the sound of my approach he looks up. “I’ve been drawing old Keyhole again!” he says like a schoolboy.

Nevertheless, if critics of standing are to be drawn like this by authors of position, then it seems to me that there is nothing before us but to say Good-bye for ever to the Dignity of Letters.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

Being the First Chapter of "The Mind of the Race"

§ 1

It was one of Boon's peculiarities to maintain a legend about every one he knew, and to me it was his humour to ascribe a degree of moral earnestness that I admit only too sadly is altogether above my quality. Having himself invented this great project of a book upon the Mind of the Race which formed always at least the thread of the discourse when I was present, he next went some way towards foisting it upon me. He would talk to me about it in a tone of remonstrance, raise imaginary difficulties to propositions I was supposed to make and superstitions I entertained, speak of it as "this book Bliss is going to write"; and at the utmost admit no more than collaboration. Possibly I contributed ideas; but I do not remember doing so now very distinctly. Possibly my influence was quasi-moral. The proposition itself fluctuated in his mind to suit this presentation and that, it had more steadfastness in mine. But if I was the anchorage he was the ship. At any rate we planned and discussed

a book that Boon pretended that I was writing and that I believed him to be writing, in entire concealment from Miss Bathwick, about the collective mind of the whole human race.

Edwin Dodd was with us, I remember, in one of those early talks, when the thing was still taking form, and he sat on a large inverted flowerpot – we had camped in the greenhouse after lunch – and he was smiling, with his head slightly on one side and a wonderfully foxy expression of being on his guard that he always wore with Boon. Dodd is a leading member of the Rationalist Press Association, a militant agnostic, and a dear, compact man, one of those Middle Victorians who go about with a preoccupied, caulking air, as though, after having been at great cost and pains to banish God from the Universe, they were resolved not to permit Him back on any terms whatever. He has constituted himself a sort of alert customs officer of a materialistic age, saying suspiciously, “Here, now, what’s this rapping under the table here?” and examining every proposition to see that the Creator wasn’t being smuggled back under some specious new generalization. Boon used to declare that every night Dodd looked under his bed for the Deity, and slept with a large revolver under his pillow for fear of a revelation... From the first Dodd had his suspicions about this collective mind of Boon’s. Most unjustifiable they seemed to me then, but he had them.

“You must admit, my dear Dodd – ” began Boon.

“I admit nothing,” said Dodd smartly.

“You perceive something more extensive than individual wills and individual processes of reasoning in mankind, a body of thought, a trend of ideas and purposes, a thing made up of the synthesis of all the individual instances, something more than their algebraic sum, losing the old as they fall out, taking up the young, a common Mind expressing the species – ”

“Oh – figuratively, perhaps!” said Dodd.

§ 2

For my own part I could not see where Dodd’s “figuratively” comes in. The mind of the race is as real to me as the mind of Dodd or my own. Because Dodd is completely made up of Dodd’s right leg plus Dodd’s left leg, plus Dodd’s right arm plus Dodd’s left arm plus Dodd’s head and Dodd’s trunk, it doesn’t follow that Dodd is a mere figurative expression...

Dodd, I remember, protested he had a self-consciousness that held all these constituents together, but there was a time when Dodd was six months old, let us say, and there are times now when Dodd sleeps or is lost in some vivid sensation or action, when that clear sense of self is in abeyance. There is no reason why the collective mind of the world should not presently become at least as self-conscious as Dodd. Boon, indeed, argued that that was happening even now, that our very talk in the greenhouse was to that synthetic over-brain like a child’s first intimations of the idea of “me.” “It’s a *fantastic* notion,” said Dodd, shaking his

head.

But Boon was fairly launched now upon his topic, and from the first, I will confess, it took hold of me.

“You mustn’t push the analogy of Dodd’s mind too far,” said Boon. “These great Over-minds – ”

“So there are several!” said Dodd.

“They fuse, they divide. These great Over-minds, these race minds, share nothing of the cyclic fate of the individual life; there is no birth for them, no pairing and breeding, no inevitable death. That is the lot of such intermediate experimental creatures as ourselves. The creatures below us, like the creatures above us, are free from beginnings and ends. The Amoeba never dies; it divides at times, parts of it die here and there, it has no sex, no begetting. (Existence without a love interest. My God! how it sets a novelist craving!) Neither has the germ plasm. These Over-minds, which for the most part clothe themselves in separate languages and maintain a sort of distinction, stand to us as we stand to the amœbæ or the germ cells we carry; they are the next higher order of being; they emerge above the intense, intensely defined struggle of individuals which is the more obvious substance of lives at the rank of ours; they grow, they divide, they feed upon one another, they coalesce and rejuvenate. So far they are like amœbæ. But they think, they accumulate experiences, they manifest a collective will.”

“Nonsense!” said Dodd, shaking his head from side to side.

“But the thing is manifest!”

“I’ve never met it.”

“You met it, my dear Dodd, the moment you were born. Who taught you to talk? Your mother, you say. But whence the language? Who made the language that gives a bias to all your thoughts? And who taught you to think, Dodd? Whence came your habits of conduct? Your mother, your schoolmaster were but mouthpieces, the books you read the mere forefront of that great being of Voices! There it is – your antagonist to-day. You are struggling against it with tracts and arguments...”

But now Boon was fairly going. Physically, perhaps, we were the children of our ancestors, but mentally we were the offspring of the race mind. It was clear as daylight. How could Dodd dare to argue? We emerged into a brief independence of will, made our personal innovation, became, as it were, new thoughts in that great intelligence, new elements of effort and purpose, and were presently incorporated or forgotten or both in its immortal growth. Would the Race Mind incorporate Dodd or dismiss him? Dodd sat on his flowerpot, shaking his head and saying “Pooh!” to the cinerarias; and I listened, never doubting that Boon felt the truth he told so well. He came near making the Race soul incarnate. One felt it about us, receptive and responsive to Boon’s words. He achieved personification. He spoke of wars that peoples have made, of the roads and cities that grow and the routes that develop, no man planning them. He mentioned styles of architecture and styles of living; the gothic cathedral, I remember, he dwelt upon, a beauty,

that arose like an exhalation out of scattered multitudes of men. He instanced the secular abolition of slavery and the establishment of monogamy as a development of Christian teaching, as things untraceable to any individual's purpose. He passed to the mysterious consecutiveness of scientific research, the sudden determination of the European race mind to know more than chance thoughts could tell it...

“Francis Bacon?” said Dodd.

“Men like Bacon are no more than bright moments, happy thoughts, the discovery of the inevitable word; the race mind it was took it up, the race mind it was carried it on.”

“Mysticism!” said Dodd. “Give me the Rock of Fact!” He shook his head so violently that suddenly his balance was disturbed; clap went his feet, the flowerpot broke beneath him, and our talk was lost in the consequent solitudes.

§ 3

Now that I have been searching my memory, I incline rather more than I did to the opinion that the bare suggestion at any rate of this particular Book did come from me. I probably went to Boon soon after this talk with Dodd and said a fine book might be written about the Mind of Humanity, and in all likelihood I gave some outline – I have forgotten what. I wanted a larger picture of that great Being his imagination had struck out. I remember at any, rate Boon taking me into his study, picking out Goldsmith's

“Inquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning,” turning it over and reading from it. “Something in this line?” he said, and read:

“Complaints of our degeneracy in literature as well as in morals I own have been frequently exhibited of late... The dullest critic who strives at a reputation for delicacy, by showing he cannot be pleased ...’

“The old, old thing, you see! The weak protest of the living.”

He turned over the pages. “He shows a proper feeling, but he’s a little thin... He says some good things. But – ‘The age of Louis XIV, notwithstanding these respectable names, is still vastly, superior.’ Is it? Guess the respectable names that age of Louis XIV could override! – Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, D’Alembert! And now tell me the respectable names of the age of Louis XIV. And the conclusion of the whole matter —

“Thus the man who, under the patronage of the great might have done honour to humanity, when only patronized by the bookseller becomes a thing a little superior to the fellow who works at the press.’

“The patronage of the great! ‘Fellow who works at the press’! Goldsmith was a damnably genteel person at times in spite of the ‘Vicar’! It’s printed with the long ‘s,’ you see. It all helps to remind one that times have changed.” ...

I followed his careless footsteps into the garden; he went gesticulating before me, repeating, “An Inquiry into the State of Polite Learning’! That’s what your ‘Mind of the Race’ means.

Suppose one did it now, we should do it differently in every way, from that.”

“Yes, but how should we do it?” said I.

The project had laid hold upon me. I wanted a broad outline of the whole apparatus of thinking and determination in the modern State; something that should bring together all its various activities, which go on now in a sort of deliberate ignorance of one another, which would synthesize research, education, philosophical discussion, moral training, public policy. “There is,” I said, “a disorganized abundance now.”

“It’s a sort of subconscious mind,” said Boon, seeming to take me quite seriously, “with a half instinctive will...”

We discussed what would come into the book. One got an impression of the enormous range and volume of intellectual activity that pours along now, in comparison with the jejune trickle of Goldsmith’s days. Then the world had – what? A few English writers, a few men in France, the Royal Society, the new Berlin Academy (conducting its transactions in French), all resting more or less upon the insecure patronage of the “Great”; a few schools, public and private, a couple of dozen of universities in all the world, a press of which *The Gentleman’s Magazine* was the brightest ornament. Now —

It is a curious thing that it came to us both as a new effect, this enormously greater size of the intellectual world of to-day. We didn’t at first grasp the implications of that difference, we simply found it necessitated an enlargement of our conception. “And

then a man's thoughts lived too in a world that had been created, lock, stock, and barrel, a trifle under six thousand years ago!..”

We fell to discussing the range and divisions of our subject. The main stream, we settled, was all that one calls “literature” in its broader sense. We should have to discuss that principally. But almost as important as the actual development of ideas, suggestions, ideals, is the way they are distributed through the body of humanity, developed, rendered, brought into touch with young minds and fresh minds, who are drawn so into participation, who themselves light up and become new thoughts. One had to consider journalism, libraries, book distribution, lecturing, teaching. Then there is the effect of laws, of inventions... “Done in a large, dull, half-abstract way,” said Boon, “one might fill volumes. One might become an Eminent Sociologist. You might even invent terminology. It’s a chance –”

We let it pass. He went on almost at once to suggest a more congenial form, a conversational novel. I followed reluctantly. I share the general distrust of fiction as a vehicle of discussion. We would, he insisted, invent a personality who would embody our Idea, who should be fanatically obsessed by this idea of the Mind of the Race, who should preach it on all occasions and be brought into illuminating contact with all the existing mental apparatus and organization of the world. “Something of your deep, moral earnestness, you know, only a little more presentable and not quite so vindictive,” said Boon, “and without your – lapses. I seem to see him rather like Leo Maxse: the same white face,

the same bright eyes, the same pervading suggestion of nervous intensity, the same earnest, quasi-reasonable voice – but instead of that anti-German obsession of his, an intelligent passion for the racial thought. He must be altogether a fanatic. He must think of the Mind of the Race in season and out of season. Collective thought will be no joke to him; it will be the supremely important thing. He will be passionately a patriot, entirely convinced of your proposition that ‘the thought of a community is the life of a community,’ and almost as certain that the tide of our thought is ebbing.”

“Is it?” said I.

“I’ve never thought. The ‘Encyclopædia Britannica’ says it is.”

“We must call the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica.’”

“As a witness – in the book – rather! But, anyhow, this man of ours will believe it and struggle against it. It will make him ill; it will spoil the common things of life for him altogether. I seem to see him interrupting some nice, bright, clean English people at tennis. ‘Look here, you know,’ he will say, ‘this is all very well. But have you *thought* to-day? They tell me the Germans are thinking, the Japanese.’ I see him going in a sort of agony round and about Canterbury Cathedral. ‘Here are all these beautiful, tranquil residences clustering round this supremely beautiful thing, all these well-dressed, excellent, fresh-coloured Englishmen in their beautiful clerical raiment – deans, canons – and what have they *thought*, any of them? I keep my ear to the *Hibbert Journal*, but is it enough?’ Imagine him going through

London on an omnibus. He will see as clear as the advertisements on the hoardings the signs of the formal breaking up of the old Victorian Church of England and Dissenting cultures that have held us together so long. He will see that the faith has gone, the habits no longer hold, the traditions lie lax like cut string — there is nothing to replace these things. People do this and that dispersedly; there is democracy in beliefs even, and any notion is as good as another. And there is America. Like a burst Haggis. Intellectually. The Mind is confused, the Race in the violent ferment of new ideas, in the explosive development of its own contrivances, has lost its head. It isn't thinking any more; it's stupefied one moment and the next it's diving about —

“It will be as clear as day to him that a great effort of intellectual self-control must come if the race is to be saved from utter confusion and dementia. And nobody seems to see it but he. He will go about wringing his hands, so to speak. I fancy him at last at a writing-desk, nervous white fingers clutched in his black hair. ‘How can I put it so that they *must* attend and see?’”

So we settled on our method and principal character right away. But we got no farther because Boon insisted before doing anything else on drawing a fancy portrait of this leading character of ours and choosing his name. We decided to call him Hallery, and that he should look something like this —

That was how “The Mind of the Race” began, the book that was to have ended at last in grim burlesque with Hallery's murder of Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole in his villa at Hampstead, and the

conversation at dawn with that incredulous but literate policeman at Highgate – he was reading a World’s Classic – to whom Hallery gave himself up.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

The Great Slump, the Revival of Letters, and the Garden by the Sea

§ 1

The story, as Boon planned it, was to begin with a spacious Introduction. We were to tell of the profound decadence of letters at the opening of the Twentieth Century and how a movement of revival began. A few notes in pencil of this opening do exist among the Remains, and to those I have referred. He read them over to me...

“We begin,” he said, “in a minor key. The impetus of the Romantic movement we declare is exhausted; the Race Mind, not only of the English-speaking peoples but of the whole world, has come upon a period of lethargy. The Giants of the Victorian age – ”

My eye discovered a familiar binding among the flower-pots. “You have been consulting the ‘Encyclopædia Britannica,’” I said.

He admitted it without embarrassment.

“I have prigged the whole thing from the last Victorian Edition – with some slight variations... ‘The Giants of the Victorian age

had passed. Men looked in vain for their successors. For a time there was an evident effort to fill the vacant thrones; for a time it seemed that the unstinted exertions of Miss Marie Corelli, Mr. Hall Caine, Mrs. Humphry Ward, and the friends of Mr. Stephen Phillips might go some way towards obliterating these magnificent gaps. And then, slowly but surely, it crept into men's minds that the game was up – ”

“You will alter that phrase?” I said.

“Certainly. But it must serve now ... ‘that, humanly speaking, it was impossible that anything, at once so large, so copious, so broadly and unhesitatingly popular, so nobly cumulative as the Great Victorian Reputations could ever exist again. The Race seemed threatened with intellectual barrenness; it had dropped its great blossoms, and stood amidst the pile of their wilting but still showy petals, budless and bare. It is curious to recall the public utterances upon literature that distinguished this desolate and melancholy time. It is a chorus of despair. There is in the comments of such admirable but ageing critics as still survived, of Mr. Gosse, for example, and the venerable Sir Sidney Colvin and Mr. Mumchance, an inevitable suggestion of widowhood; the judges, bishops, statesmen who are called to speak upon literature speak in the same reminiscent, inconsolable note as of a thing that is dead. Year after year one finds the speakers at the Dinner of the Royal Literary Fund admitting the impudence of their appeal. I remember at one of these festivities hearing the voice of Mr. Justice Gummidge break... The strain, it is needless

to say, found its echo in Dr. Tomlinson Keyhole; he confessed he never read anything that is less than thirty years old with the slightest enjoyment, and threw out the suggestion that nothing new should be published – at least for a considerable time – unless it was clearly shown to be posthumous...

“Except for a few irresistible volumes of facetiousness, the reading public very obediently followed the indications of authority in these matters, just as it had followed authority and sustained the Giants in the great Victorian days. It bought the long-neglected classics – anything was adjudged a classic that was out of copyright – it did its best to read them, to find a rare smack in their faded allusions, an immediate application for their forgotten topics. It made believe that architects were still like Mr. Pecksniff and schoolmasters like Squeers, that there were no different women from Jane Austen’s women, and that social wisdom ended in Ruskin’s fine disorder. But with the decay, of any intellectual observation of the present these past things had lost their vitality. A few resolute people maintained an artificial interest in them by participation in quotation-hunting competitions and the like, but the great bulk of the educated classes ceased presently to read anything whatever. The classics were still bought by habit, as people who have lost faith will still go to church; but it is only necessary to examine some surviving volume of this period to mark the coruscation of printer’s errors, the sheets bound in upside down or accidentally not inked in printing or transferred from some sister classic in the same

series, to realize that these volumes were mere receipts for the tribute paid by the pockets of stupidity to the ancient prestige of thought...

“An air of completion rested upon the whole world of letters. A movement led by Professor Armstrong, the eminent educationist, had even gone some way towards banishing books from the schoolroom – their last refuge. People went about in the newly invented automobile and played open-air games; they diverted what attention they had once given to their minds to the more rational treatment of their stomachs. Reading became the last resort of those too sluggish or too poor to play games; one had recourse to it as a substitute for the ashes of more strenuous times in the earlier weeks of mourning for a near relative, and even the sale of classics began at last to decline. An altogether more satisfying and alluring occupation for the human intelligence was found in the game of Bridge. This was presently improved into Auction Bridge. Preparations were made for the erection of a richly decorative memorial in London to preserve the memory of Shakespeare, an English Taj Mahal; an Academy of uncreative literature was established under the Presidency of Lord Reay (who had never written anything at all), and it seemed but the matter of a few years before the goal of a complete and final mental quiet would be attained by the whole English-speaking community...”

§ 2

“You know,” I said, “that doesn’t exactly represent – ”

“Hush!” said Boon. “It was but a resting phase! And at this point I part company with the ‘Encyclopædia.’”

“But you didn’t get all that out of the ‘Encyclopædia’?”

“Practically – yes. I may have rearranged it a little. The Encyclopædist is a most interesting and representative person. He takes up an almost eighteenth-century attitude, holds out hopes of a revival of Taste under an Academy, declares the interest of the great mass of men in literature is always ‘empirical,’ regards the great Victorian boom in letters as quite abnormal, and seems to ignore what you would call that necessary element of vitalizing thought... It’s just here that Hallery will have to dispute with him. We shall have to bring them together in our book somehow... Into this impressive scene of decline and the ebb of all thinking comes this fanatic Hallery of ours, reciting with passionate conviction, ‘the thought of a nation is the life of a nation.’ You see our leading effect?”

He paused. “We have to represent Hallery as a voice crying in the wilderness. We have to present him in a scene of infinite intellectual bleakness, with the thinnest scrub of second-rate books growing contemptibly, and patches of what the Encyclopædist calls tares – wind-wilted tares – about him. A mournful Encyclopædist like some lone bird circling in the empty

air beneath the fading stars... Well, something of that effect, anyhow! And then, you know, suddenly, mysteriously one grows aware of light, of something coming, of something definitely coming, of the dawn of a great Literary Revival..."

"How does it come?"

"Oh! In the promiscuous way of these things. The swing of the pendulum, it may be. Some eminent person gets bored at the prospect of repeating that rigmarole about the great Victorians and our present slackness for all the rest of his life, and takes a leaf from one of Hallery's books. We might have something after the fashion of the Efficiency and Wake-up-England affair. Have you ever heard guinea-fowl at dawn?"

"I've heard them at twilight. They say, 'Come back. Come back.' But what has that to do with -"

"Nothing. There's a movement, a stir, a twittering, and then a sudden promiscuous uproar, articles in the reviews, articles in the newspapers, paragraphs, letters, associations, societies, leagues. I imagine a very great personality indeed in the most extraordinary and unexpected way coming in..." (It was one of Boon's less amiable habits to impute strange and uncanny enterprises, the sudden adoption of movements, manias, propagandas, adherence to vegetarianism, socialism, the strangest eccentricities, to the British royal family.) "As a result Hallery finds himself perforce a person of importance. 'The thought of a nation is the life of a nation,' one hears it from royal lips; 'a literature, a living soul, adequate to this vast empire,' turns up in the speech of

a statesman of the greatest literary pretensions. Arnold White responds to the new note. The *Daily Express* starts a Literary Revival on its magazine page and offers a prize. The *Times* follows suit. Reports of what is afoot reach social circles in New York... The illumination passes with a dawnlike swiftness right across the broad expanse of British life, east and west flash together; the ladies' papers and the motoring journals devote whole pages to 'New Literature,' and there is an enormous revival of Book Teas... That sort of thing, you know – extensively."

§ 3

"So much by way of prelude. Now picture to yourself the immediate setting of my conference. Just hand me that book by the 'Encyclopædia.'"

It was Mallock's "New Republic." He took it, turned a page or so, stuck a finger in it, and resumed.

"It is in a narrow, ill-kept road by the seaside, Bliss. A long wall, plaster-faced, blotched and peeling, crested with uncivil glass against the lower orders, is pierced by cast-iron gates clumsily classical, and through the iron bars of these there is visible the deserted gatekeeper's lodge, its cracked windows opaque with immemorial dirt, and a rich undergrowth of nettles beneath the rusty cypresses and stone-pines that border the carriage-way. An automobile throbs in the road; its occupants regard a board leaning all askew above the parapet, and hesitate

to descend. On the board, which has been enriched by the attentions of the passing boy with innumerable radiant mud pellets, one reads with difficulty —

THIS CLASSICAL VILLA

with magnificent gardens in the Victorian-Italian style reaching down to the sea, and replete with Latin and Greek inscriptions, a garden study, literary associations, fully matured Oxford allusions, and a great number of conveniently arranged bedrooms, to be

LET OR SOLD

Apply to the owner,

Mr. W. H. MALLOCK,

original author of

“The New Republic”

of the motor-car, and he rises, throws aside his furs, and reveals – the urbane presence of the Encyclopædist. He descends, and rings a clangorous bell... Eh?"

"It's the garden of the 'New Republic'?"

"Exactly. Revisited. It's an astonishing thing. Do you know the date of the 'New Republic'? The book's nearly forty years old! About the time of Matthew Arnold's 'Friendship's Garland,' and since that time there's been nothing like a systematic stocktaking of the English-speaking mind – until the Encyclopædist reported 'no effects.' And I propose to make this little party in the motor-car a sort of scratch expedition, under the impetus of the proposed Revival of Thought. They are prospecting for a Summer Congress, which is to go into the state of the republic of letters thoroughly. It isn't perhaps quite Gosse's style, but he has to be there – in a way he's the official British man of letters – but we shall do what we can for him, we shall make him show a strong disposition towards protective ironies and confess himself not a little bothered at being dragged into the horrid business. And I think we must have George Moore, who has played uncle to so many movements and been so uniformly disappointed in his nephews. And William Archer, with that face of his which is so exactly like his mind, a remarkably fine face mysteriously marred by an expression of unscrupulous integrity. And lastly, Keyhole."

"Why Keyhole?" I asked.

"Hallery has to murder some one. I've planned that – and who

would he murder but Keyhole?.. And we have to hold the first meeting in Mallock's garden to preserve the continuity of English thought.

“Very well! Then we invent a morose, elderly caretaker, greatly embittered at this irruption. He parleys for a time through the gate with all the loyalty of his class, mentions a number of discouraging defects, more particularly in the drainage, alleges the whole place is clammy, and only at Gosse's clearly enunciated determination to enter produces the key.”

Boon consulted his text. “Naturally one would give a chapter to the Villa by the Sea and Mallock generally. Our visitors explore. They visit one scene after another familiar to the good Mallockite; they descend ‘the broad flights of steps flanked by Gods and Goddesses’ that lead from one to another of the ‘long, straight terraces set with vases and Irish yews,’ and the yews, you know, have suffered from the want of water, the vases are empty, and ivy, under the benediction of our modest climate, has already veiled the classical freedom – the conscientious nudity, one might say – of the statuary. The laurels have either grown inordinately or perished, and the ‘busts of orators, poets, and philosophers’ ‘with Latin inscriptions,’ stand either bleakly exposed or else swallowed up, in a thicket. There is a pleasing struggle to translate the legends, and one gathers scholarship is not extinct in England.

“The one oasis in a universal weediness is the pond about the ‘scaly Triton,’ which has been devoted to the culture of spring onions, a vegetable to which the aged custodian quite

superfluously avows himself very 'partial.' The visitors return to the house, walk along its terrace, survey its shuttered front, and they spend some time going through its musty rooms. Dr. Keyhole distinguishes himself by the feverish eagerness of his curiosity about where Leslie slept and where was the boudoir of Mrs. Sinclair. He insists that a very sad and painful scandal about these two underlies the *New Republic*, and professes a thirsty desire to draw a veil over it as conspicuously as possible. The others drag him away to the summer dining-room, now a great brier tangle, where once Lady Grace so pleasantly dined her guests. The little arena about the fountain in a porphyry basin they do not find, but the garden study they peer into, and see its inkpot in the shape of a classical temple, just as Mr. Mallock has described it, and the windowless theatre, and, in addition, they find a small private gas-works that served it. The old man lets them in, and by the light of uplifted vestas they see the decaying, rat-disordered ruins of the scene before which Jenkinson who was Jowett, and Herbert who was Ruskin, preached. It is as like a gorge in the Indian Caucasus as need be. The Brocken act-drop above hangs low enough to show the toes of the young witch, still brightly pink...

"They go down to the beach, and the old man, with evil chuckles, recalls a hitherto unpublished anecdote of mixed bathing in the 'seventies, in which Mrs. Sinclair and a flushed and startled Dr. Jenkinson, Greek in thought rather than action, play the chief parts, and then they wade through a nettle-bed to

that ‘small classical portico’ which leads to the locked enclosure containing the three tombs, with effigies after the fashion of Genoa Cemetery. But the key of the gate is lost, so that they cannot go in to examine them, and the weeds have hidden the figures altogether.

“‘That’s a pity,’ some one remarks, ‘for it’s here, no doubt, that old Laurence lies, with his first mistress and his last – under these cypresses.’

“The aged custodian makes a derisive noise, and every one turns to him.

“‘I gather you throw some doubt?’ the Encyclopædist begins in his urbane way.

“‘Buried – under the cypresses – first mistress and last!’ The old man makes his manner invincibly suggestive of scornful merriment.

“‘But isn’t it so?’

“‘Bless y’r ’art, *no!* Mr. Laurence – buried! Mr. Laurence worn’t never alive!’

“‘But there was a *young* Mr. Laurence?’

“‘That was Mr. Mallup ’imself, that was! ’E was a great mistifier was Mr. Mallup, and sometimes ’e went about pretendin’ to be Mr. Laurence and sometimes he was Mr. Leslie, and sometimes – But there, you’d ’ardly believe. ’E got all this up – cypresses, chumes, everythink – out of ’is ’ed. Po’try. Why! ’Ere! Jest come along ’ere, gents!’

“He leads the way along a narrow privet alley that winds its

surreptitious way towards an alcove.

“‘Miss Merton,’ he says, flinging the door of this open.

“‘The Roman Catholic young person?’ says Dr. Tomlinson
Keyhole.

“‘Quite right, sir,’ says the aged custodian.

“‘They peer in.

“‘Hanging from a peg the four visitors behold a pale blue dress cut in the fashion of the ’seventies, a copious ‘chignon’ of fair hair, large earrings, and on the marble bench a pair of open-work stockings and other articles of feminine apparel. A tall mirror hangs opposite these garments, and in a little recess convenient to the hand are the dusty and decaying materials for a hasty ‘make-up.’

“‘The old custodian watches the effect of this display upon the others with masked enjoyment.

“‘You mean Miss Merton *painted*?’ said the Encyclopædist, knitting his brows.

“‘Mr. Mallup did,’ says the aged custodian.

“‘You mean – ?’

“‘Mr. Mallup was Miss Merton. ’E got ’er up too. Parst ’er orf as a young lady, ’e did. Oh, ’e was a great mistifier was Mr. Mallup. None of the three of ’em wasn’t real people, really; he got ’em all up.’

“‘She had sad-looking eyes, a delicate, proud mouth, and a worn, melancholy look,’ muses Mr. Archer.

“‘And young Laurence was in love with her,’ adds the

Encyclopædist...

““They was all Mr. Mallup,’ says the aged custodian. ‘Made up out of ’is ’ed. And the gents that pretended they was Mr. ’Uxley and Mr. Tyndall in disguise, one was Bill Smithers, the chemist’s assistant, and the other was the chap that used to write and print the *Margate Advertiser* before the noo papers come.”

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

Of Art, of Literature, of Mr. Henry James

§ 1

The Garden by the Sea chapter was to have gone on discursively with a discussion upon this project of a conference upon the Mind of the Race. The automobile-ful of gentlemen who had first arrived was to have supplied the opening interlocutors, but presently they were to have been supplemented by the most unexpected accessories. It would have been an enormously big dialogue if it had ever been written, and Boon's essentially lazy temperament was all against its ever getting written. There were to have been disputes from the outset as to the very purpose that had brought them all together. "A sort of literary stocktaking" was to have been Mr. Archer's phrase. Repeated. Unhappily, its commercialism was to upset Mr. Gosse extremely; he was to say something passionately bitter about its "utter lack of dignity." Then relenting a little, he was to urge as an alternative "some controlling influence, some standard and restraint, a new and better Academic influence." Dr. Keyhole

was to offer his journalistic services in organizing an Academic plebiscite, a suggestion which was to have exasperated Mr. Gosse to the pitch of a gleaming silence.

In the midst of this conversation the party is joined by Hallery and an American friend, a quiet Harvard sort of man speaking meticulously accurate English, and still later by emissaries of Lord Northcliffe and Mr. Hearst, by Mr. Henry James, rather led into it by a distinguished hostess, by Mr. W. B. Yeats, late but keen, and by that Sir Henry Lunn who organizes the Swiss winter sports hotels. All these people drift in with an all too manifestly simulated accidentalness that at last arouses the distrust of the elderly custodian, so that Mr. Orage, the gifted editor of the *New Age*, arriving last, is refused admission. The sounds of the conflict at the gates do but faintly perturb the conference within, which is now really getting to business, but afterwards Mr. Orage, slightly wounded in the face by a dexterously plied rake and incurably embittered, makes his existence felt by a number of unpleasant missiles discharged from over the wall in the direction of any audible voices. Ultimately Mr. Orage gets into a point of vantage in a small pine-tree overlooking the seaward corner of the premises, and from this he contributes a number of comments that are rarely helpful, always unamiable, and frequently in the worst possible taste.

Such was Boon's plan for the second chapter of "The Mind of the Race." But that chapter he never completely planned. At various times Boon gave us a number of colloquies, never

joining them together in any regular order. The project of taking up the discussion of the Mind of the Race at the exact point Mr. Mallock had laid it down, and taking the villa by the sea for the meeting-place, was at once opposed by Hallery and his American friend with an evidently preconcerted readiness. They pointed out the entire democratization of thought and literature that had been going on for the past four decades. It was no longer possible to deal with such matters in the old aristocratic country-house style; it was no longer possible to take them up from that sort of beginning; the centre of mental gravity among the English-speaking community had shifted socially and geographically; what was needed now was something wider and ampler, something more in the nature of such a conference as the annual meeting of the British Association. Science left the gentleman's mansion long ago; literature must follow it – had followed it. To come back to Mr. Lankester's Villa by the sea was to come back to a beaten covert. The Hearst representative took up a strongly supporting position, and suggested that if indeed we wished to move with the times the thing to do was to strike out boldly for a special annex of the Panama Exhibition at San Francisco and for organization upon sound American lines. It was a case, he said, even for "exhibits." Sir Henry Lunn, however, objected that in America the Anglo-Saxon note was almost certain to be too exclusively sounded; that we had to remember there were vigorous cultures growing up and growing up more and more detachedly upon the continent of Europe; we wanted,

at least, their reflected lights ... some more central position...
In fact, Switzerland ... where also numerous convenient hotels
... patronized, he gathered from the illustrated papers, by Lord
Lytton, Mrs. Asquith, Mr. F. R. Benson ... and all sorts of helpful
leading people.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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