

GALSWORTHY JOHN

THE BURNING SPEAR:
BEING THE
EXPERIENCES OF MR.
JOHN LAVENDER IN THE
TIME OF WAR

John Galsworthy
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John Galsworthy

The Burning Spear

*“With a heart of furious fancies,
Whereof I am commander,
With a burning spear and a horse of air
In the wilderness I wander;
With a night of ghosts and shadows
I summoned am to tourney
Ten leagues beyond the wide world’s end
For me it is no journey.”*

TOM O’BEDLAM

I

THE HERO

In the year – there dwelt on Hampstead Heath a small thin gentleman of fifty-eight, gentle disposition, and independent means, whose wits had become somewhat addled from reading the writings and speeches of public men. The castle which, like every Englishman, he inhabited was embedded in lilac bushes and laburnums, and was attached to another castle, embedded, in deference to our national dislike of uniformity, in acacias and laurustinus. Our gentleman, whose name was John Lavender, had until the days of the Great War passed one of those curious existences are sometimes to be met with, in doing harm to nobody. He had been brought up to the Bar, but like most barristers had never practised, and had spent his time among animals and the wisdom of the past. At the period in which this record opens he owned a young female sheep-dog called Blink, with beautiful eyes obscured by hair; and was attended to by a thin and energetic housekeeper, in his estimation above all weakness, whose name was Marian Petty, and by her husband, his chauffeur, whose name was Joe.

It was the ambition of our hero to be, like all public men, without fear and without reproach. He drank not, abstained from fleshly intercourse, and habitually spoke the truth. His face

was thin, high cheek-boned, and not unpleasing, with one loose eyebrow over which he had no control; his eyes, bright and of hazel hue, looked his fellows in the face without seeing what was in it. Though his moustache was still dark, his thick waving hair was permanently white, for his study was lined from floor to ceiling with books, pamphlets, journals, and the recorded utterances of great mouths. He was of a frugal habit, ate what was put before him without question, and if asked what he would have, invariably answered: "What is there?" without listening to the reply. For at mealtimes it was his custom to read the writings of great men.

"Joe," he would say to his chauffeur, who had a slight limp, a green wandering eye, and a red face, with a rather curved and rather redder nose, "You must read this."

And Joe would answer:

"Which one is that, sir?"

"Hummingtop; a great man, I think, Joe."

"A brainy chap, right enough, sir."

"He has done wonders for the country. Listen to this." And Mr. Lavender would read as follows: "If I had fifty sons I would give them all. If I had forty daughters they should nurse and scrub and weed and fill shells; if I had thirty country-houses they should all be hospitals; if I had twenty pens I would use them all day long; if had ten voices they should never cease to inspire and aid my country."

"If 'e had nine lives," interrupted Joe, with a certain

suddenness, “‘e’d save the lot.”

Mr. Lavender lowered the paper.

“I cannot bear cynicism, Joe; there is no quality so unbecoming to a gentleman.”

“Me and ‘im don’t put in for that, sir.”

“Joe, Mr. Lavender would say you are, incorrigible...”

Our gentleman, in common with all worthy of the name, had a bank-book, which, in hopes that it would disclose an unsuspected balance, he would have “made up” every time he read an utterance exhorting people to invest and save their country.

One morning at the end of May, finding there was none, he called in his housekeeper and said:

“Mrs. Petty, we are spending too much; we have again been exhorted to save. Listen! ‘Every penny diverted from prosecution of the war is one more spent in the interests of the enemies of mankind. No patriotic person, I am confident; will spend upon him or herself a stiver which could be devoted to the noble ends so near to all our hearts. Let us make every spare copper into bullets to strengthen the sinews of war!’ A great speech. What can we do without?”

“The newspapers, sir.”

“Don’t be foolish, Mrs. Petty. From what else could we draw our inspiration and comfort in these terrible days?”

Mrs. Petty sniffed. “Well, you can’t eat less than you do,” she said; “but you might stop feedin’ Blink out of your rations – that

I do think.”

“I have not found that forbidden as yet in any public utterance,” returned Mr. Lavender; “but when the Earl of Betternot tells us to stop, I shall follow his example, you may depend on that. The country comes before everything.” Mrs. Petty tossed her head and murmured darkly —

“Do you suppose he’s got an example, Sir?”

“Mrs. Petty,” replied Mr. Lavender, “that is quite unworthy of you. But, tell me, what can we do without?”

“I could do without Joe,” responded Mrs. Petty, “now that you’re not using him as chauffeur.”

“Please be serious. Joe is an institution; besides, I am thinking of offering myself to the Government as a speaker now that we may use gas.”

“Ah!” said Mrs. Petty.

“I am going down about it to-morrow.”

“Indeed, sir!”

“I feel my energies are not fully employed.”

“No, sir?”

“By the way, there was a wonderful leader on potatoes yesterday. We must dig up the garden. Do you know what the subsoil is?”

“Brickbats and dead cats, I expect, sir.”

“Ah! We shall soon improve that. Every inch of land reclaimed is a nail in the coffin of our common enemies.”

And going over to a bookcase, Mr. Lavender took out the third

from the top of a pile of newspapers. "Listen!" he said. "The problem before us is the extraction of every potential ounce of food. No half measures must content us. Potatoes! Potatoes! No matter how, where, when the prime national necessity is now the growth of potatoes. All Britons should join in raising a plant which may be our very salvation.

"Fudge!" murmured Mrs. Petty.

Mr. Lavender read on, and his eyes glowed.

"Ah!" he thought, "I, too, can do my bit to save England... It needs but the spark to burn away the dross of this terrible horse-sense which keeps the country back.

"Mrs. Petty!" But Mrs. Petty was already not.

.....

The grass never grew under the feet of Mr. Lavender, No sooner had he formed his sudden resolve than he wrote to what he conceived to be the proper quarter, and receiving no reply, went down to the centre of the official world. It was at time of change and no small national excitement; brooms were sweeping clean, and new offices had arisen everywhere. Mr. Lavender passed bewildered among large stone buildings and small wooden buildings, not knowing where to go. He had bought no clothes since the beginning of the war, except the various Volunteer uniforms which the exigencies of a shifting situation had forced the authorities to withdraw from time to time; and his, small shrunken figure struck somewhat vividly on the eye, with elbows and knees shining in the summer sunlight. Stopping

at last before the only object which seemed unchanged, he said:

“Can you tell me where the Ministry is?”

The officer looked down at him.

“What for?”

“For speaking about the country.”

“Ministry of Propagation? First on the right, second door on the left.”

“Thank you. The Police are wonderful.”

“None of that,” said the officer coldly.

“I only said you were wonderful.”

“I ‘eard you.”

“But you are. I don’t know what the country would do without you. Your solid qualities, your imperturbable bonhomie, your truly British tenderness towards – ”

“Pass away!” said the officer.

“I am only repeating what we all say of you,” rejoined Mr. Lavender reproachfully.

“Did you ‘ear me say ‘Move on,’” said the officer; “or must I make you an example?”

“YOU are the example,” said Mr. Lavender warmly.

“Any more names,” returned the officer, “and I take you to the station.” And he moved out into the traffic. Puzzled by his unfriendliness Mr. Lavender resumed his search, and, arriving at the door indicated, went in. A dark, dusty, deserted corridor led him nowhere, till he came on a little girl in a brown frock, with her hair down her back.

“Can you tell me, little one – ” he said, laying his hand on her head.

“Chuck it!” said the little girl.

“No, no!” responded Mr. Lavender, deeply hurt. “Can you tell me where I can find the Minister?”

“Ave you an appointment?”

“No; but I wrote to him. He should expect me.”

“Wot nyme?”

“John Lavender. Here is my card.”

“I’ll tyke it in. Wyte ‘ere!”

“Wonderful!” mused Mr. Lavender; “the patriotic impulse already stirring in these little hearts! What was the stanza of that patriotic poet?”

“Lives not a babe who shall not feel the pulse

Of Britain’s need beat wild in Britain’s wrist.

And, sacrificial, in the world’s convulse

Put up its lips to be by Britain kissed.’

“So young to bring their lives to the service of the country!”

“Come on,” said the little girl, reappearing suddenly; “e’ll see you.”

Mr. Lavender entered a room which had a considerable resemblance to the office of a lawyer save for the absence of tomes. It seemed furnished almost exclusively by the Minister, who sat with knees crossed, in a pair of large round tortoiseshell spectacles, which did not, however, veil the keenness of his eyes. He was a man with close cropped grey hair, a broad, yellow,

clean-shaven face, and thrusting grey eyes.

“Mr. Lavender,” he said, in a raw, forcible voice; “sit down, will you?”

“I wrote to you,” began our hero, “expressing the wish to offer myself as a speaker.”

“Ah!” said the Minister. “Let’s see – Lavender, Lavender. Here’s your letter.” And extracting a letter from a file he read it, avoiding with difficulty his tortoise-shell spectacles. “You want to stump the country? M.A., Barrister, and Fellow of the Zoological. Are you a good speaker?”

“If zeal – ” began Mr. Lavender.

“That’s it; spark! We’re out to win this war, sir.”

“Quite so,” began Mr. Lavender. “If devotion – ”

“You’ll have to use gas,” said the Minister; “and we don’t pay.”

“Pay!” cried Mr. Lavender with horror; “no, indeed!”

The Minister bent on him a shrewd glance.

“What’s your line? Anything particular, or just general patriotism? I recommend that; but you’ll have to put some punch into it, you know.”

“I have studied all the great orators of the war, sir,” said Mr. Lavender, “and am familiar with all the great writers on, it. I should form myself on them; and if enthusiasm – ”

“Quite!” said the Minister. “If you want any atrocities we can give you them. No facts and no figures; just general pat.”

“I shall endeavour – ” began Mr. Lavender.

“Well, good-bye,” said the Minister, rising. “When do you

start?"

Mr. Lavender rose too. "To-morrow," he said, "if I can get inflated."

The Minister rang a bell.

"You're on your own, mind," he said. "No facts; what they want is ginger. Yes, Mr. Japes?"

And seeing that the Minister was looking over his tortoiseshell. spectacles at somebody behind him, Mr. Lavender turned and went out. In the corridor he thought, "What terseness! How different from the days when Dickens wrote his 'Circumlocution Office'! Punch!" And opening the wrong door, he found himself in the presence of six little girls in brown frocks, sitting against the walls with their thumbs in their mouths.

"Oh!" he said, "I'm afraid I've lost my way."

The eldest of the little girls withdrew a thumb.

"What d'yer want?"

"The door," said Mr. Lavender.

"Second on the right."

"Goodbye," said Mr. Lavender.

The little girls did not answer. And he went out thinking, "These children are really wonderful! What devotion one sees! And yet the country is not yet fully roused!"

II

THE VALET

Joe Petty stood contemplating the car which, purchased some fifteen years before had not been used since the war began. Birds had nested in its hair. It smelled of mould inside; it creaked from rust. "The Guv'nor must be cracked," he thought, "to think we can get anywhere in this old geyser. Well, well, it's summer; if we break down it won't break my 'cart. Government job – better than diggin' or drillin'. Good old Guv!" So musing, he lit his pipe and examined the recesses beneath the driver's seat. "A bottle or three," he thought, "in case our patriotism should get us stuck a bit off the beaten; a loaf or two, some 'oney in a pot, and a good old 'am.

"A life on the rollin' road – 'Ow they can give 'im the job I can't think!" His soliloquy was here interrupted by the approach of his wife, bearing a valise.

"Don't you wish you was comin', old girl?" he remarked to her lightly.

"I do not; I'm glad to be shut of you. Keep his feet dry. What have you got under there?"

Joe Petty winked.

"What a lumbering great thing it looks!" said Mrs. Petty, gazing upwards.

“Ah!” returned her husband thoughtfully, we’ll ‘ave the population round us without advertisement. And taking the heads of two small boys who had come up, he knocked them together in an absent-minded fashion.

“Well,” said Mrs. Petty, “I can’t waste time. Here’s his extra set of teeth. Don’t lose them. Have you got your own toothbrush? Use it, and behave yourself. Let me have a line. And don’t let him get excited.” She tapped her forehead.

“Go away, you boys; shoo!”

The boys, now six in number, raised a slight cheer; for at that moment Mr. Lavender, in a broad-brimmed grey felt hat and a holland dust-coat, came out through his garden-gate carrying a pile of newspapers and pamphlets so large that his feet, legs, and hat alone were visible.

“Open the door, Joe!” he said, and stumbled into the body of the vehicle. A shrill cheer rose from the eight boys, who could see him through the further window. Taking this for an augury of success, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and putting his head through the window, thus addressed the ten boys:

“I thank you. The occasion is one which I shall ever remember. The Government has charged me with the great task of rousing our country in days which demand of each of us the utmost exertions. I am proud to feel that I have here, on the very threshold of my task, an audience of bright young spirits, each one of whom in this democratic country has in him perhaps the makings of a General or even of a Prime Minister. Let it be your

earnest endeavour, boys – ”

At this moment a piece of indiarubber rebounded from Mr. Lavender's forehead, and he recoiled into the body of the car.

“Are you right, sir?” said Joe, looking in; and without waiting for reply he started the engine. The car moved out amid a volley of stones, balls, cheers, and other missiles from the fifteen boys who pursued it with frenzy. Swaying slightly from side to side, with billowing bag, it gathered speed, and, turning a corner, took road for the country. Mr. Lavender, somewhat dazed, for the indiarubber had been hard, sat gazing through the little back window at the great city he was leaving. His lips moved, expressing unconsciously the sentiments of innumerable Lord Mayors: “Greatest City in the world, Queen of Commerce, whose full heart I can still hear beating behind me, in mingled pride and regret I leave you. With the most sacred gratitude I lay down my office. I go to other work, whose – Joe!”

“Sir?”

“Do you see that?”

“I see your ‘ead, that’s all, sir.”

“We seem to be followed by a little column of dust, which keeps ever at the same distance in the middle of the road. Do you think it can be an augury.”

“No; I should think it’s a dog.”

“In that case, hold hard!” said Mr. Lavender, who had a weakness for dog’s. Joe slackened the car’s pace, and leaned his head round the corner. The column of dust approached rapidly.

“It is a dog,” said Mr. Lavender, “it’s Blink.”

The female sheep-dog, almost flat with the ground from speed, emerged from the dust, wild with hair and anxiety, white on the cheeks and chest and top of the head, and grey in the body and the very little tail, and passed them like a streak of lightning.

“Get on!” cried Mr. Lavender, excited; “follow her she’s trying to catch us up!”

Joe urged on the car, which responded gallantly, swaying from side to side, while the gas-bag bellied and shook; but the faster it went the faster the sheep-dog flew in front of it.

“This is dreadful!” said Mr. Lavender in anguish, leaning far out. “Blink! Blink!”

His cries were drowned in the roar of the car.

“Damn the brute!” muttered Joe, “at this rate she’ll be over the edge in ‘alf a mo’. Wherever does she think we are?”

“Blink! Blink!” wailed Mr. Lavender. “Get on, Joe, get on! She’s gaining on us!”

“Well I never see anything like this,” said Joe, “chasin’ wot’s chasing you! Hi! Hi!”

Urged on by their shouts and the noise of the pursuing car, the poor dog redoubled her efforts to rejoin her master, and Mr. Lavender, Joe, and the car, which had begun to emit the most lamentable creaks and odours, redoubled theirs.

“I shall bust her up,” said Joe.

“I care not!” cried Mr. Lavender. “I must recover the dog.”

They flashed through the outskirts of the Garden City. “Stop

her, stop her!" called Mr. Lavender to such of the astonished inhabitants as they had already left behind. "This is a nightmare, Joe!"

"It's a blinkin' day-dream," returned Joe, forcing the car to an expiring spurt.

"If she gets to that 'ill before we ketch 'er, we're done; the old geyser can't 'alf crawl up 'ills."

"We're gaining," shrieked Mr. Lavender; "I can see her tongue."

As though it heard his voice, the car leaped forward and stopped with a sudden and most formidable jerk; the door burst open, and Mr. Lavender fell out upon his sheep-dog.

Fortunately they were in the only bed of nettles in that part of the world, and its softness and that of Blink assuaged the severity of his fall, yet it was some minutes before he regained the full measure of his faculties. He came to himself sitting on a milestone, with his dog on her hind legs between his knees, licking his face clean, and panting down his throat.

"Joe," he said; "where are you?"

The voice of Joe replied from underneath the car: "Here sir. She's popped."

"Do you mean that our journey is arrested?"

"Ah! We're in irons. You may as well walk 'ome, sir. It ain't two miles.

"No! no!" said Mr. Lavender. "We passed the Garden City a little way back; I could go and hold a meeting. How long will

you be?”

“A day or two,” said Joe.

Mr. Lavender sighed, and at this manifestation of his grief his sheep-dog redoubled her efforts to comfort him. “Nothing becomes one more than the practice of philosophy,” he thought. “I always admired those great public men who in moments of national peril can still dine with a good appetite. We will sit in the car a little, for I have rather a pain, and think over a speech.” So musing he mounted the car, followed by his dog, and sat down in considerable discomfort.

“What subject can I choose for a Garden City?” he thought, and remembering that he had with him the speech of a bishop on the subject of babies, he dived into his bundle of literature, and extracting a pamphlet began to con its periods. A sharp blow from a hammer on the bottom of the car just below where Blink was sitting caused him to pause and the dog to rise and examine her tiny tail.

“Curious,” thought Mr. Lavender dreamily, “how Joe always does the right thing in the wrong place. He is very English.” The hammering continued, and the dog, who traced it to the omnipotence of her master, got up on the seat where she could lick his face. Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

“Joe,” he said, leaning out and down; “must you?”

The face of Joe, very red, leaned out and up. “What’s the matter now, sir?”

“I am preparing a speech; must you hammer?”

“No,” returned Joe, “I needn’t.”

“I don’t wish you to waste your time,” said Mr Lavender.

“Don’t worry about that, sir,” replied Joe; “there’s plenty to do.”

“In that case I shall be glad to finish my speech.”

Mr. Lavender resumed his seat and Blink her position on the floor, with her head on his feet. The sound of his voice soon rose again in the car like the buzzing of large flies. “If we are to win this war we must have an ever-increasing population. In town and countryside, in the palace and the slum, above all in the Garden City, we must have babies.”

Here Blink, who had been regarding him with lustrous eyes, leaped on to his knees and licked his mouth. Again Mr. Lavender was compelled to stop.

“Down, Blink, down! I am not speaking to you. ‘The future of our country depends on the little citizens born now. I especially appeal to women. It is to them we must look – ’”

“Will you ‘ave a glass, sir?”

Mr. Lavender saw before him a tumbler containing a yellow fluid.

“Joe,” he said sadly, “you know my rule – ”

“‘Ere’s the exception, sir.”

Mr. Lavender sighed. “No, no; I must practise what I preach. I shall soon be rousing the people on the liquor question, too.”

“Well, ‘ere’s luck,” said Joe, draining the glass. “Will you ‘ave a slice of ‘am?”

“That would not be amiss,” said Mr. Lavender, taking Joe’s knife with the slice of ham upon its point. “It is to them that we must look,” he resumed, “to rejuvenate the Empire and make good the losses in the firing-line.” And he raised the knife to his mouth. No result followed, while Blink wriggled on her base and licked her lips.

“Blink!” said Mr. Lavender reproachfully. “Joe!”

“Sir!”

“When you’ve finished your lunch and repaired the car you will find me in the Town Hall or market-place. Take care of Blink. I’ll tie her up. Have you some string?”

Having secured his dog to the handle of the door and disregarded the intensity of her gaze, Mr. Lavender walked back towards the Garden City with a pamphlet in one hand and a crutch-handled stick in the other. Restoring the ham to its nest behind his feet, Joe finished the bottle of Bass. “This is a bit of all right!” he thought dreamily. “Lie down, you bitch! Quiet! How can I get my nap while you make that row? Lie down! That’s better.”

Blink was silent, gnawing at her string. The smile deepened on Joe’s face, his head fell a little one side his mouth fell open a fly flew into it.

“Ah!” he thought, spitting it out; “dog’s quiet now.” He slept.

III

MR. LAVENDER ADDRESSES A CROWD OF HUNS

“Give them ginger!” thought Mr. Lavender, approaching the first houses. “My first task, however, will be to collect them.”

“Can you tell me,” he said to a dustman, “where the market-place is?”

“Ain’t none.”

“The Town Hall, then?”

“Likewise.”

“What place is there, then,” said Mr. Lavender, “where people congregate?”

“They don’t.”

“Do they never hold public meetings here?”

“Ah!” said the dustman mysteriously.

“I wish to address them on the subject of babies.”

“Bill! Gent abaht babies. Where’d he better go?”

The man addressed, however, who carried a bag of tools, did not stop.

“You, ’ear?” said the dustman, and urging his horse, passed on.

“How rude!” thought Mr. Lavender. Something cold and wet was pressed against his hand, he felt a turmoil, and saw Blink moving round and round him, curved like a horseshoe, with

a bit of string dangling from her white neck. At that moment of discouragement the sight of one who believed in him gave Mr. Lavender nothing but pleasure. "How wonderful dogs are!" he murmured. The sheep-dog responded by bounds and ear-splitting barks, so that two boys and a little girl wheeling a perambulator stopped to look and listen.

"She is like Mercury," thought Mr. Lavender; and taking advantage of her interest in his hat, which she had knocked off in her effusions, he placed his hand on her head and crumpled her ear. The dog passed into an hypnotic trance, broken by soft grumblings of pleasure. "The most beautiful eyes in the world!" thought Mr. Lavender, replacing his hat; "the innocence and goodness of her face are entrancing."

In his long holland coat, with his wide-brimmed felt hat all dusty, and the crutch-handled stick in his hand, he had already arrested the attention of five boys, the little girl with the perambulator, a postman, a maid-servant, and three old ladies.

"What a beautiful dog yours is!" said one of the old ladies; "dear creature! Are you a shepherd?"

Mr. Lavender removed his hat.

"No, madam," he said; "a public speaker."

"How foolish of me!" replied the old lady.

"Not at all, madam; the folly is mine." And Mr. Lavender bowed. "I have come here to give an address on babies."

The old lady looked at him shrewdly, and, saying something in a low voice to her companions, passed on, to halt again a little

way off.

In the meantime the rumour that there was a horse down in the Clemenceau Road had spread rapidly, and more boys, several little girls, and three soldiers in blue, with red ties, had joined the group round Mr. Lavender, to whom there seemed something more than providential in this rapid assemblage. Looking round him for a platform from which to address them, he saw nothing but the low wall of the little villa garden outside which he was standing. Mounting on this, therefore, and firmly grasping the branch of a young acacia tree to steady himself, he stood upright, while Blink, on her hind legs, scratched at the wall, whining and sniffing his feet.

Encouraged by the low murmur of astonishment, which swelled idly into a shrill cheer, Mr. Lavender removed his hat, and spoke as follows:

“Fellow Britons, at this crisis in the history of our country I make no apology for addressing myself to the gathering I see around me. Here, in the cradle of patriotism and the very heart of Movements, I may safely assume that you are aware of the importance of Man-power. At a moment when every man of a certain age and over is wanted at the front, and every woman of marriageable years is needed in hospitals, in factories, on the land, or where not, we see as never before the paramount necessity of mobilizing the forces racial progress and increasing the numbers of our population. Not a man, not a woman can be spared from the great task in which they are now engaged, of

defeating the common enemy. Side by side with our American cousins, with la belle France, and the Queen of the Adriatic, we are fighting to avert the greatest menace which ever threatened civilization. Our cruel enemies are strong and ruthless. While I have any say in this matter, no man or woman shall be withdrawn from the sacred cause of victory; better they should die to the last unit than that we should take our hands from the plough. But, ladies and gentlemen, we must never forget that in the place of every one who dies we must put two. Do not be content with ordinary measures; these are no piping times of peace. Never was there in the history of this country such a crying need for – for twins, if I may put it picturesquely. In each family, in each home where there are no families, let there be two babies where there was one, for thus only can we triumph over the devastation of this war.” At this moment the now considerable audience, which had hitherto been silent, broke into a shrill “‘Ear, ‘ear!” and Mr. Lavender, taking his hand from the acacia branch to silence them, fell off the wall into the garden. Seeing her master thus vanish, Blink, who had never ceased to whine and sniff his toes, leaped over and landed on his chest. Rising with difficulty, Mr. Lavender found himself in front of an elderly man with a commercial cast of countenance, who said: “You’re trespassing!”

“I am aware of it,” returned Mr. Lavender and I beg your pardon. It was quite inadvertent, however.

“Rubbish!” said the man.

“I fell off the wall.”

“Whose wall do you think it is?” said the man.

“How should I know?” said Mr. Lavender; “I am a stranger.”

“Out you go,” said the man, applying his boot to Blink.

Mr. Lavender’s eyes blazed. “You may insult me,” he said, “but you must not kick my dog, or I shall do you an injury.”

“Try!” said the man.

“I will,” responded Mr. Lavender, taking off his holland coat.

To what extremities he would have proceeded cannot be told, for at this moment the old lady who had taken him for a shepherd appeared on the path, tapping her forehead with finger.

“All right!” said the owner of the garden, “take him away.”

The old lady laced her hand within Mr. Lavender’s arm.

“Come with me, sir,” she said, “and your nice doggie.”

Mr. Lavender, whose politeness to ladies was invariable, bowed, and resuming his coat accompanied her through the ‘garden gate. “He kicked my dog,” he said; “no action could be more despicable.”

“Yes, yes,” said the old lady soothingly. “Poor doggie!”

The crowd, who had hoped for better things, here gave vent to a prolonged jeer.

“Stop!” said Mr. Lavender; “I am going to take a collection.

“There, there!” said the old lady. “Poor man!”

“I don’t know what you mean by that, madam,” said Mr. Lavender, whose spirit was roused; “I shall certainly take a collection, in the interests of our population.” So saying he removed his hat, and disengaging his arm from the old lady’s

hand, moved out into the throng, extending the hat. A boy took it from him at once, and placing it on his head, ran off, pursued by Blink, who, by barking and jumping up increased the boy's speed to one of which he could never have thought himself capable. Mr. Lavender followed, calling out "Blink!" at the top of his voice. The crowd followed Mr. Lavender, and the old lady followed crowd. Thus they proceeded until the boy, arriving at a small piece of communal water, flung the hat into the middle of it, and, scaling the wall, made a strategic detour and became a disinterested spectator among the crowd. The hat, after skimming the surface of the pond, settled like a water-lily, crown downwards, while Blink, perceiving in all this the hand of her master, stood barking at it wildly. Mr. Lavender arrived at the edge of the pond slightly in advance of the crowd.

"Good Blink!" he said. "Fetch it! Good Blink!"

Blink looked up into his face, and, with the acumen for which her breed is noted, perceiving he desired her to enter the water backed away from it.

"She is not a water dog," explained Mr. Lavender to the three soldiers in blue clothes.

"Good dog; fetch it!" Blink backed into the soldiers, who, bending down, took her by head tail, threw her into the pond, and encouraged her on with small stones pitched at the hat. Having taken the plunge, the intelligent animal waded boldly to the hat, and endeavoured by barking and making little rushes at it with her nose, to induce it to return to shore.

“She thinks it’s a sheep,” said Mr. Lavender; “a striking instance of hereditary instinct.”

Blink, unable to persuade the hat, mounted it with her fore-paws and trod it under.

“Ooray!” shouted the crowd.

“Give us a shilling, gov’nor, an’ I’ll get it for yer?”

“Thank you, my boy,” said Mr. Lavender, producing a shilling.

The boy – the same boy who had thrown it in – stepped into the water and waded towards the hat. But as he approached, Blink interposed between him and the hat, growling and showing her teeth.

“Does she bite?” yelled the boy.

“Only strangers,” cried Mr. Lavender.

Excited by her master’s appeal, Blink seized the jacket of the boy, who made for the shore, while the hat rested in the centre of the pond, the cynosure of the stones with which the soldiers were endeavouring to drive it towards the bank. By this, time the old lady had rejoined Mr. Lavender.

“Your nice hat she murmured.

“I thank you for your sympathy, madam,” Lavender, running his hand through his hair; “in moments like these one realizes the deep humanity of the British people. I really believe that in no other race could you find such universal interest and anxiety to recover a hat. Say what you will, we are a great nation, who only, need rousing to show our best qualities. Do you remember

the words of the editor: ‘In the spavined and spatch-cocked ruin to which our inhuman enemies have reduced civilization, we of the island shine with undimmed effulgence in all those qualities which mark man out from the ravening beast?’”

“But how are you going to get your hat?” asked the old lady.

“I know not,” returned Mr. Lavender, still under the influence of the sentiment he had quoted; “but if I had fifteen hats I would take them all off to the virtues which have been ascribed to the British people by all those great men who have written and spoken since the war began.”

“Yes,” said the old lady soothingly. “But, I think you had better come under my sunshade. The sun is very strong.”

“Madam,” said Mr. Lavender, “you are very good, but your sunshade is too small. To deprive you of even an inch of its shade would be unworthy of anyone in public life.” So saying, he recoiled from the proffered sunshade into the pond, which he had forgotten was behind him.

“Oh, dear!” said the old lady; “now you’ve got your feet wet!”

“It is nothing,” responded Mr. Lavender gallantly. And seeing that he was already wet, he rolled up his trousers, and holding up the tails of his holland coat, turned round and proceeded towards his hat, to the frantic delight of the crowd.

“The war is a lesson to us to make little of little things,” he thought, securing the hat and wringing it out. “My feet are wet, but – how much wetter they would be in the trenches, if feet can be wetter than wet through,” he mused with some

exactitude. "Down, Blink, down!" For Blink was plastering him with the water-marks of joy and anxiety. "Nothing is quite so beautiful as the devotion of one's own dog," thought Mr. Lavender, resuming the hat, and returning towards the shore. The by-now-considerable throng were watching him with every mark of acute enjoyment; and the moment appeared to Mr. Lavender auspicious for addressing them. Without, therefore, emerging from the pond, which he took for his, platform, he spoke as follows:

"Circumstances over which I have no control have given me the advantage of your presence in numbers which do credit to the heart of the nation to which we all belong. In the midst of the greatest war which ever threatened the principle of Liberty, I rejoice to see so many people able to follow the free and spontaneous impulses of their inmost beings. For, while we must remember that our every hour is at the disposal of our country, we must not forget the maxim of our fathers: 'Britons never will be slaves.' Only by preserving the freedom of individual conscience, and at the same time surrendering it whole-heartedly to every which the State makes on us, can we hope defeat the machinations of the arch enemies of mankind."

At this moment a little stone hit him sharply on the hand.

"Who threw that stone?" said Mr. Lavender. "Let him stand out."

The culprit, no other indeed than he who had thrown the hat in, and not fetched it out for a shilling, thus menaced with

discovery made use of a masterly device, and called out loudly:
“Pro-German!”

Such was the instinctive patriotism of the crowd that the cry was taken up in several quarters; and for the moment Mr. Lavender remained speechless from astonishment. The cries of “Pro-German!” increased in volume, and a stone hitting her on the nose caused Blink to utter a yelp; Mr. Lavender’s eyes blazed.

“Huns!” he cried; “Huns! I am coming out.”

With this prodigious threat he emerged from the pond at the very moment that a car scattered the throng, and a well-known voice said:

“Well, sir, you ‘ave been goin’ it!”

“Joe,” said Mr. Lavender, “don’t speak to me!”

“Get in.”

“Never!”

“Pro-Germans!” yelled the crowd.

“Get in!” repeated Joe.

And seizing Mr. Lavender as if collaring him at football, he knocked off his hat, propelled him into the car, banged the door, mounted, and started at full speed, with Blink leaping and barking in front of them.

Debouching from Piave Parade into Bottomley Lane he drove up it till the crowd was but a memory before he stopped to examine the condition his master. Mr. Lavender was hanging out of window, looking back, and shivering violently.

“Well, sir,” said Joe. “I don’t think!”

“Joe,” said Mr. Lavender that crowd ought not to be at large. They were manifestly Huns.

“The speakin’s been a bit too much for you, sir,” said Joe. “But you’ve got it off your chest, anyway.”

Mr. Lavender regarded him for a moment in silence; then putting his hand to his throat, said hoarsely:

“No, on my chest, I think, Joe. All public speakers do. It is inseparable from that great calling.”

“Alf a mo’!” grunted Joe, diving into the recesses beneath the driving-seat. “Ere, swig that off, sir.”

Mr. Lavender raised the tumbler of fluid to his mouth, and drank it off; only from the dregs left on his moustache did he perceive that it smelled of rum and honey.

“Joe,” he said reproachfully, “you have made me break my pledge.”

Joe smiled. “Well, what are they for, sir? You’ll sleep at ‘ome to-night.”

“Never,” said Mr. Lavender. “I shall sleep at High Barnet; I must address them there tomorrow on abstinence during the war.”

“As you please, sir. But try and ‘ave a nap while we go along.” And lifting Blink into the car, where she lay drenched and exhausted by excitement, with the petal of a purple flower clinging to her black nose, he mounted to his seat and drove off. Mr. Lavender, for years unaccustomed to spirituous liquor, of which he had swallowed nearly half a pint neat, passed rapidly

into a state of coma. Nor did he fully regain consciousness till he awoke in bed the next morning.

IV

INTO THE DANGERS OF A PUBLIC LIFE

“At what time is my meeting?” thought Mr. Lavender vaguely, gazing at the light filtering through the Venetian blind. “Blink!”

His dog, who was lying beside his bed gnawing a bone which with some presence of mind she had brought in, raised herself and regarded him with the innocence of her species. “She has an air of divine madness,” thought Mr. Lavender, “which is very pleasing to me. I have a terrible headache.” And seeing a bellrope near his hand he pulled it.

A voice said: “Yes, sir.”

“I wish to see my servant, Joe Petty,” said Lavender. “I shall not require any breakfast thank you. What is the population of High Barnet?”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about, sir,” answered the voice, which seemed to be that of his housekeeper; “but you can’t see Joe; he’s gone out with a flea in his ear. The idea of his letting you get your feet wet like that!

“How is this?” said Mr. Lavender. “I thought you were the chambermaid of the inn at High Barnet?”

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Petty soothingly, placing a thermometer in his mouth. “Smoke that a minute, sir. Oh! look

at what this dog's brought in! Fie!" And taking the bone between thumb and finger she cast it out of the window; while Blink, aware that she was considered in the wrong, and convinced that she was in the right, spread out her left paw, laid her head on her right paw, and pressed her chin hard against it. Mrs. Petty, returning from the window, stood above her master, who lay gazing up with the thermometer jutting out through the middle of his moustache.

"I thought so!" she said, removing it; "a hundred and one. No getting up for you, sir! That Joe!"

"Mrs. Petty," said Mr. Lavender rather feebly, for his head pained him excessively, "bring me the morning papers."

"No, sir. The thermometer bursts at an an' ten. I'll bring you the doctor."

Mr. Lavender was about to utter a protest when he reflected that all public men had doctors.

"About the bulletin?" he said faintly.

"What?" ejaculated Mrs. Petty, whose face seemed to Mr. Lavender to have become all cheekbones, eyes, and shadows. Joe never said a about a bullet. Where? and however did you get it in?

"I did not say 'bullet in'," murmured Mr. Lavender closing his eyes! "I said bulletin. They have it."

At this mysterious sentence Mrs. Petty lifted her hands, and muttering the word "Ravin'!" hastened from the room. No sooner had she gone, however, than Blink, whose memory was perfect, rose, and going to the window placed her forepaws on the sill.

Seeing her bone shining on the lawn below, with that disregard of worldly consequence which she shared with all fine characters, she leaped through. The rattle of the Venetian blind disturbed Mr. Lavender from the lethargy to which he had reverted. "Mr. John Lavender passed a good night," he thought, "but his condition is still critical." And in his disordered imagination he seemed to see people outside Tube stations, standing stock-still in the middle of the traffic, reading that bulletin in the evening papers. "Let me see," he mused, "how will they run?" To-morrow I shall be better, but not yet able to leave my bed; the day after to-morrow I shall have a slight relapse, and my condition will still give cause for anxiety; on the day following – What is that noise. For a sound like the whiffling of a wind through dry sticks combined with the creaking of a saw had, impinged on his senses. It was succeeded by scratching. "Blink!" said Mr. Lavender. A heartrending whine came from outside the door. Mr. Lavender rose and opened it. His dog came in carrying her bone, and putting it down by the bed divided her attention between it and her master's legs, revealed by the nightshirt which, in deference to the great Disraeli, he had never abandoned in favour of pyjamas. Having achieved so erect a posture Mr. Lavender, whose heated imagination had now carried him to the convalescent stage of his indisposition, felt that a change of air would do him good, and going to the window, leaned out above a lilac-tree.

"Mr. John Lavender," he murmured, "has gone to his seat to recuperate before resuming his public duties."

While he stood there his attention was distracted by a tall young lady of fine build and joyous colour, who was watering some sweet-peas in the garden of the adjoining castle: Naturally delicate, Mr. Lavender at once sought a jacket, and, having put it on, resumed his position at the window. He had not watched her more than two minutes before he saw that she was cultivating soil, and, filled with admiration, he leaned still further out, and said:

“My dear young madam, you are doing a great work.”

Thus addressed, the young lady, who had those roving grey eyes which see everything and betoken a large nature not devoid of merry genius, looked up and smiled.

“Believe me,” continued Mr. Lavender, “no task in these days is so important as the cultivation of the soil; now that we are fighting to the last man and the last dollar every woman and child in the islands should put their hands to the plough. And at that word his vision became feverishly enlarged, so that he seemed to see not merely the young lady, but quantities of young ladies, filling the whole garden.

“This,” he went on, raising his voice, “is the psychological moment, the turning-point in the history of these islands. The defeat of our common enemies imposes on us the sacred duty of feeding ourselves once more. ‘There is a tide in the affairs of men which taken at the flood leads on to – Oh!’” For in his desire to stir his audience, Mr. Lavender had reached out too far, and losing foothold on his polished bedroom floor, was slipping

down into the lilac-bush. He was arrested by a jerk from behind; where Blink, moved by this sudden elopement of her master, had seized him by the nightshirt tails, and was staying his descent.

“Is anything up?” said the young lady.

“I have lost my balance,” thickly answered Mr. Lavender, whose blood was running to his head, which was now lower than his feet. “Fortunately, my dog seems to be holding me from behind. But if someone could assist her it would be an advantage, for I fear that I am slipping.”

“Hold on!” cried the young lady. And breaking through the low privet hedge which separated the domains, she vanished beneath him with a low gurgling sound.

Mr. Lavender, who dared not speak again for fear that Blink, hearing his voice, might let go to answer, remained suspended, torn with anxiety about his costume. “If she comes in,” he thought, “I shall die from shame. And if she doesn’t, I shall die from a broken neck. What a dreadful alternative!” And he firmly grasped the most substantial lilac-boughs within his reach, listening with the ears of a hare for any sound within the room, in which he no longer was to any appreciable extent. Then the thought of what a public man should feel in his position came to his rescue. “We die but once,” he mused; “rather than shock that charming lady let me seek oblivion.” And the words of his obituary notice at once began to dance before his eyes. “This great public servant honoured his country no less in his death than in his life.” Then striking out vigorously with his

feet he launched his body forward. The words “My goodness!” resounded above him, as all restraining influence was suddenly relaxed; Mr. Lavender slid into the lilac-bush, turned heels over head, and fell bump on the ground. He lay there at full length, conscious of everything, and especially of the faces of Blink and the young lady looking down on him from the window.

“Are you hurt?” she called.

“No,” said Mr. Lavender, “that is – er – yes,” he added, ever scrupulously exact.

“I’m coming down,” said the young lady.

“Don’t move!”

With a great effort Mr. Lavender arranged his costume, and closed his eyes. “How many lie like this, staring at the blue heavens!” he thought.

“Where has it got you?” said a voice; and he saw the young lady bending over him.

“In the dorsal region, I think,” said Mr. Lavender. “But I suffer more from the thought that I – that you – ”

“That’s all right,” said the young lady; “I’m a V.A.D. It WAS a bump! Let’s see if you can – ” and taking his hands she raised him to a sitting posture. “Does it work?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Lavender rather faintly.

“Try and stand,” said the young lady, pulling.

Mr. Lavender tried, and stood; but no, sooner was he on his feet than she turned her face away. Great tears rolled down her cheeks; and she writhed and shook all over.

“Don’t!” cried Mr. Lavender, much concerned. “I beg you not to cry. It’s nothing, I assure you – nothing!” The young lady with an effort controlled her emotion, and turned her large grey eyes on him.

“The angelic devotion of nurses!” murmured Mr. Lavender, leaning against the wall of the house with his hand to his back. “Nothing like it has been seen since the world began.”

“I shall never forget the sight!” said the young lady, choking.

Mr. Lavender, who took the noises she made for sobbing, was unutterably disturbed.

“I can’t bear to see you distressed on my account,” he said. “I am quite well, I assure you; look – I can walk!” And he started forth up the garden in his nightshirt and Norfolk jacket. When he turned round she was no longer there, sounds of uncontrollable emotion were audible from the adjoining garden. Going to the privet hedge, he looked over. She was lying gracefully on the grass, with her face smothered in her hands, and her whole body shaking. “Poor thing!” thought Mr. Lavender. “No doubt she is one of those whose nerves have been destroyed by the terrible sights she has seen!” But at that moment the young lady rose and ran as if demented into her castle. Mr. Lavender stayed transfixed. “Who would not be ill for the pleasure of drinking from a cup held by her hand?” he thought. “I am fortunate to have received injuries in trying to save her from confusion. Down, Blink, down!”

For his dog, who had once more leaped from the window,

was frantically endeavouring to lick his face. Soothing her, and feeling his anatomy, Mr. Lavender became conscious that he was not alone. An old lady was standing on the gardenpath which led to the front gate, holding in her hand a hat. Mr. Lavender sat down at once, and gathering his nightshirt under him, spoke as follows:

“There are circumstances, madam, which even the greatest public servants cannot foresee, and I, who am the humblest of them, ask you to forgive me for receiving you in this costume.”

“I have brought your hat back,” said the old lady with a kindling eye; “they told me you lived here and I was anxious to know that you and your dear dog were none the worse.”

“Madam,” replied Mr. Lavender, “I am infinitely obliged to you. Would you very kindly hang my hat up on the – er – weeping willow tree?”

At this moment a little white dog, who accompanied the old lady, began sniffing round Mr. Lavender, and Blink, wounded in her proprietary instincts, placed her paws at once on her master’s shoulders, so that he fell prone. When he recovered a sitting posture neither the old lady nor the little dog were in sight, but his hat was hanging on a laurel bush. “There seems to be something fateful about this morning,” he mused; “I had better go in before the rest of the female population – ” and recovering his feet with difficulty, he took his hat, and was about to enter the house when he saw the young lady watching him from an upper window of the adjoining castle. Thinking to relieve her anxiety, he said at

once:

“My dear young lady, I earnestly beg you to believe that such a thing never happens to me, as a rule.”

Her face was instantly withdrawn, and, sighing deeply, Mr. Lavender entered the house and made his way upstairs. “Ah!” he thought, painfully recumbent in his bed once more, “though my bones ache and my head burns I have performed an action not unworthy of the traditions of public life. There is nothing more uplifting than to serve Youth and Beauty at the peril of one’s existence. Humanity and Chivalry have ever been the leading characteristics of the British race;” and, really half-delirious now, he cried aloud: “This incident will for ever inspire those who have any sense of beauty to the fulfilment of our common task. Believe me, we shall never sheathe the sword until the cause of humanity and chivalry is safe once more.”

Blink, ever uneasy about sounds which seemed to her to have no meaning, stood up on her hind legs and endeavoured to stay them by licking his face; and Mr. Lavender, who had become so stiff that he could not stir without great pain, had to content himself by moving his head feebly from side to side until his dog, having taken her fill, resumed the examination of her bone. Perceiving presently that whenever he began to talk she began to lick his face, he remained silent, with his mouth open and his eyes shut, in an almost unconscious condition, from which he was roused by a voice saying:

“He is suffering from alcoholic poisoning.”

The monstrous injustice of these words restored his faculties, and seeing before him what he took to be a large concourse of people – composed in reality of Joe Petty, Mrs. Petty, and the doctor – he thus addressed them in a faint, feverish voice:

“The pressure of these times, ladies and gentlemen, brings to the fore the most pushing and obstreperous blackguards. We have amongst us persons who, under the thin disguise of patriotism, do not scruple to bring hideous charges against public men. Such but serve the blood-stained cause of our common enemies. Conscious of the purity of our private lives, we do not care what is said of us so long as we can fulfil our duty to our country. Abstinence from every form of spirituous liquor has been the watchword of all public men since this land was first threatened by the most stupendous cataclysm which ever hung over the heads of a great democracy. We have never ceased to preach the need for it, and those who say the contrary are largely Germans or persons lost to a sense of decency.” So saying, he threw off all the bedclothes, and fell back with a groan.

“Easy, easy, my dear sir!” said the voice.

“Have you a pain in your back?”

“I shall not submit,” returned our hero, “to the ministrations of a Hun; sooner will I breathe my last.”

“Turn him over,” said the voice. And Mr. Lavender found himself on his face.

“Do you feel that?” said the voice.

Mr. Lavender answered faintly into his pillow:

“It is useless for you to torture me. No German hand shall wring from me a groan.”

“Is there mania in his family?” asked the voice. At this cruel insult Mr. Lavender, who was nearly smothered, made a great effort, and clearing his mouth of the pillow, said:

“Since we have no God nowadays, I call the God of my fathers to witness that there is no saner public man than I.”

It was, however, his last effort, for the wriggle he had given to his spine brought on a kind of vertigo, and he relapsed into unconsciousness.

V

IS CONVICTED OF A NEW DISEASE

Those who were assembled round the bed of Mr. Lavender remained for a moment staring at him with their mouths open, while Blink growled faintly from underneath.

“Put your hand here,” said the doctor at last.

“There is a considerable swelling, an appearance of inflammation, and the legs are a curious colour. You gave him three-quarters of a tumbler of rum – how much honey?”

Thus addressed, Joe Petty, leaning his head a little to one side, answered:

“Not ‘alf a pot, sir.”

“Um! There are all the signs here of something quite new. He’s not had a fall, has he?”

“Has he?” said Mrs. Petty severely to her husband.

“No,” replied Joe.

“Singular!” said the doctor. Turn him back again; I want to feel his head. Swollen; it may account for his curious way of talking. Well, shove in quinine, and keep him quiet, with hot bottles to his feet. I think we have come on a new war disease. I’ll send you the quinine. Good morning.

“Wot oh!” said Joe to his wife, when they were left alone with

the unconscious body of their master. "Poor old Guv! Watch and pray!"

"However could you have given him such a thing?"

"Wet outside, wet your inside," muttered Joe sulkily, "as always been my motto. Sorry I give 'im the honey. Who'd ha' thought the product of an 'armless insect could 'a done 'im in like this?"

Fiddle said Mrs. Petty. "In my belief it's come on through reading those newspapers. If I had my way I'd bum the lot. Can I trust you to watch him while I go and get the bottles filled?"

Joe drooped his lids over his greenish eyes, and, with a whisk of her head, his wife left the room.

"Gawd 'elp us!" thought Joe, gazing at his unconscious master, and fingering his pipe; "ow funny women are! If I was to smoke in 'ere she'd have a fit. I'll just 'ave a whiff in the window, though!" And, leaning out, he drew the curtains to behind him and lighted his pipe.

The sound of Blink gnawing her bone beneath the bed alone broke the silence.

"I could do with a pint o' bitter," thought Joe; and, noticing the form of the weekly gardener down below, he said softly:

"Ello, Bob!"

"Ello?" replied the gardener. "Ow's yours?"

"Nicely."

"Goin' to 'ave some rain?"

"Ah!"

“What’s the matter with that?”

“Good for the crops.”

“Missis well?”

“So, so.”

“Wish mine was.”

“Wot’s the matter with her?”

“Busy!” replied Joe, sinking his voice. Never ‘ave a woman permanent; that’s my experience.

The gardener did not reply, but stood staring at the lilac-bush below Joe Petty’s face. He was a thin man, rather like an old horse.

“Do you think we can win this war?” resumed Joe.

“Dunno,” replied the gardener apathetically.

“We seem to be goin’ back nicely all the time.”

Joe wagged his head. “You’ve ‘it it,” he said. And, jerking his head back towards the room behind him, “Guv’nor’s got it now.”

“What?”

“The new disease.”

“What new disease?”

“Wy, the Run-abaht-an-tell-’em-’ow-to-do-it.”

“Ah!”

“‘E’s copped it fair. In bed.”

“You don’t say!”

“Not ‘alf!” Joe sank his voice still lower. “Wot’ll you bet me I don’t ketch it soon?”

The gardener uttered a low gurgle.

“The cats ‘ave been in that laylock,” he replied, twisting off a broken branch. “I’ll knock off now for a bit o’ lunch.”

But at that moment the sound of a voice speaking as it might be from a cavern, caused him and Joe Petty to stare at each other as if petrified.

“Wot is it?” whispered Joe at last.

The gardener jerked his head towards a window on the ground floor.

“Someone in pain,” he said.

“Sounds like the Guv’nor’s voice.”

“Ah!” said the gardener.

“Alf a mo’!” And, drawing in his head, Joe peered through the curtains. The bed was empty and the door open.

“Watch it! ‘E’s loose!” he called to the gardener, and descended the stairs at a run.

In fact, Mr. Lavender had come out of his coma at the words, “D’you think we can win this war?” And, at once conscious that he had not read the morning papers, had got out of bed. Sallying forth just as he was he had made his way downstairs, followed by Blink. Seeing the journals lying on the chest in the hall, he took all five to where he usually went at this time of the morning, and sat down to read. Once there, the pain he was in, added to the disorder occasioned in his brain by the five leaders, caused him to give forth a summary of their contents, while Blink pressed his knees with her chin whenever the rising of his voice betokened too great absorption, as was her wont when she wanted

him to feed her. Joe Petty joined the gardener in considerable embarrassment.

“Shan’t I not ‘alf cop it from the Missis?” he murmured. “The door’s locked.”

The voice of Mr. Lavender maintained its steady flow, rising and falling with the tides of his pain and his feelings. “What, then, is our duty? Is it not plain and simple? We require every man in the Army, for that is the ‘sine qua non’ of victory. We must greatly reinforce the ranks of labour in our shipyards – ships, ships, ships, always more ships; for without them we shall infallibly be defeated. We cannot too often repeat that we must see the great drama that is being played before our eyes steadily, and we must see it whole... Not a man must be taken from the cultivation of our soil, for on that depends our very existence as a nation. Without abundant labour of the right sort on the land we cannot hope to cope with the menace of the pirate submarine. We must have the long vision, and not be scuppered by the fears of those who would deplete our most vital industry... In munition works,” wailed Mr. Lavender’s voice, as he reached the fourth leader, “we still require the maximum of effort, and a considerable reinforcement of manpower will in that direction be necessary to enable us to establish the overwhelming superiority in the air and in guns which alone can ensure the defeat of our enemies...” He reached the fifth in what was almost a scream. “Every man up to sixty must be mobilized but here we would utter the most emphatic caveat. In the end this war will be won by the country

whose financial position stands the strain best. The last copper bullet will be the deciding factor. Our economic strength must on no account be diminished. We cannot at this time of day afford to deplete the ranks of trade and let out the very life-blood in our veins.” “We must see,” groaned Mr. Lavender, “the problem steadily, and see it whole.”

“Poor old geyser!” said the gardener; “‘e do seem bad.”

“Old me!” said Joe.

“I’ll get on the sill and see what I can do through the top o’ the window.”

He got up, and, held by the gardener, put his arm through. There was the sound of considerable disturbance, and through the barking of Blink, Mr. Lavender’s voice was heard again: “Stanch in the middle of the cataclysm, unruffled by the waters of heaven and hell, let us be captains of our souls. Down, Blink, down!”

“He’s out!” said Joe, rejoining the gardener. “Now for it, before my missis comes!” and he ran into the house.

Mr. Lavender was walking dazedly in the hall with the journals held out before him.

“Joe,” he said, catching sight of his servant, “get the car ready. I must be in five places at once, for only thus can we defeat the greatest danger which ever threatened the future of civilization.”

“Right-o, sir,” replied Joe; and, waiting till his master turned round, he seized him round the legs, and lifting that thin little body ascended the stairs, while Mr. Lavender, with the journals

waving fanlike in his hands, his white hair on end, and his legs kicking, endeavoured to turn his head to see what agency was moving him.

At the top of the stairs they came on Mrs. Petty, who, having Scotch blood in her veins, stood against the wall to let them pass, with a hot bottle in either hand. Having placed Mr. Lavender in his bed and drawn the clothes up to his eyes, Joe Petty passed the back of his hand across his brow, and wrung it out.

“Phew!” he gasped; “he’s artful!”

His wife, who had followed them in, was already fastening her eyes on the carpet.

“What’s that?” she said, sniffing.

“That?” repeated Joe, picking up his pipe; “why, I had to run to ketch ‘im, and it fell out o’ me pocket.”

“And lighted itself,” said Mrs. Petty, darting, at the floor and taking up a glowing quid which had burned a little round hole in the carpet. “You’re a pretty one!”

“You can’t foresee those sort o’ things,” said Joe.

“You can’t foresee anything,” replied his wife; “you might be a Government. Here! hold the clothes while I get the bottles to his feet. Well I never! If he hasn’t got – ” And from various parts of Mr. Lavender’s body she recovered the five journals. “For putting things in the wrong place, Joe Petty, I’ve never seen your like!”

“They’ll keep ‘im warm,” said Joe.

Mr. Lavender who, on finding himself in bed, had once more fallen into a comatose condition, stirred, and some words fell

from his lips. "Five in one, and one in five."

"What does he say?" said Mrs. Petty, tucking him up.

"It's the odds against Candelabra for the Derby."

"Only faith," cried Mr. Lavender, "can multiply exceedingly."

"Here, take them away!" muttered Mrs. Petty, and dealing the journals a smart slap, she handed them to Joe.

"Faith!" repeated Mr. Lavender, and fell into a doze.

"About this new disease," said Joe. "D'you think it's ketchin'? I feel rather funny meself."

"Stuff!" returned his wife. "Clear away those papers and that bone, and go and take Blink out, and sit on a seat; it's all you're fit for. Of all the happy-go-luckys you're the worst."

"Well, I never could worry," said Joe from the doorway; "'tisn't in me. So long!"

And, dragging Blink by the collar, he withdrew.

Alone with her patient, Mrs. Petty, an enthusiast for cleanliness and fresh air, went on her knees, and, having plucked out the charred ring of the little hole in the carpet, opened the window wider to rid the room of the smell of burning. "If it wasn't for me," she thought, leaning out into the air, "I don't know what'd become of them."

A voice from a few feet away said:

"I hope he's none the worse. What does the doctor say?"

Looking round in astonishment, Mrs. Petty saw a young lady leaning out of a window on her right.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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