

GALSWORTHY JOHN

THE FOUNDATIONS (AN
EXTRAVAGANT PLAY)

John Galsworthy

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Extravagant Play)**

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John Galsworthy

The Foundations (An Extravagant Play)

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY, M.P.

LADY WILLIAM DROMONDY

LITTLE ANNE

MISS STOKES

MR. POULDER

JAMES

HENRY

THOMAS

CHARLES

THE PRESS

LEMMY

OLD MRS. LEMMY

LITTLE AIDA

THE DUKE OF EXETER

Some ANTI-SWEATERS; Some SWEATED WORKERS; and a CROWD

SCENES

SCENE I. The cellar at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S in Park Lane.

SCENE II. The room of old MRS. LEMMY in Bethnal Green.

SCENE III. Ante-room of the hall at LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S

The Action passes continuously between 8 and 10.30 of a summer evening, some years after the Great War.

ACT I

LORD WILLIAM DROMONDY'S mansion in Park Lane. Eight o'clock of the evening. LITTLE ANNE DROMONDY and the large footman, JAMES, gaunt and grin, discovered in the wine cellar, by light of gas. JAMES, in plush breeches, is selecting wine.

L. ANNE: James, are you really James?

JAMES. No, my proper name's John.

L. ANNE. Oh! [A pause] And is Charles's an improper name too?

JAMES. His proper name's Mark.

L. ANNE. Then is Thomas Matthew?

JAMES. Miss Anne, stand clear o' that bin. You'll put your foot through one o' those 'ock bottles.

L. ANNE. No, but James – Henry might be Luke, really?

JAMES. Now shut it, Miss Anne!

L. ANNE. Who gave you those names? Not your godfathers and godmothers?

JAMES. Poulder. Butlers think they're the Almighty. [Gloomily] But his name's Bartholomew.

L. ANNE. Bartholomew Poulder? It's rather jolly.

JAMES. It's hidjeous.

L. ANNE. Which do you like to be called – John or James?

JAMES. I don't give a darn.

L. ANNE. What is a darn?

JAMES. 'Tain't in the dictionary.

L. ANNE. Do you like my name? Anne Dromondy? It's old, you know. But it's funny, isn't it?

JAMES. [Indifferently] It'll pass.

L. ANNE. How many bottles have you got to pick out?

JAMES. Thirty-four.

L. ANNE. Are they all for the dinner, or for the people who come in to the Anti-Sweating Meeting afterwards?

JAMES. All for the dinner. They give the Sweated – tea.

L. ANNE. All for the dinner? They'll drink too much, won't they?

JAMES. We've got to be on the safe side.

L. ANNE. Will it be safer if they drink too much?

[JAMES pauses in the act of dusting a bottle to look at her, as if suspecting irony.]

[Sniffing] Isn't the smell delicious here-like the taste of cherries when they've gone bad – [She sniffs again] and mushrooms; and boot blacking.

JAMES. That's the escape of gas.

L. ANNE. Has the plumber's man been?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Which one?

JAMES. Little blighter I've never seen before.

L. ANNE. What is a little blighter? Can I see?

JAMES. He's just gone.

L. ANNE. [Straying] Oh!.. James, are these really the foundations?

JAMES. You might 'arf say so. There's a lot under a woppin' big house like this; you can't hardly get to the bottom of it.

L. ANNE. Everything's built on something, isn't it? And what's THAT built on?

JAMES. Ask another.

L. ANNE. If you wanted to blow it up, though, you'd have to begin from here, wouldn't you?

JAMES. Who'd want to blow it up?

L. ANNE. It would make a mess in Park Lane.

JAMES. I've seen a lot bigger messes than this'd make, out in the war.

L. ANNE. Oh! but that's years ago! Was it like this in the trenches, James?

JAMES. [Grimly] Ah! 'Cept that you couldn't lay your 'and on a bottle o' port when you wanted one.

L. ANNE. Do you, when you want it, here?

JAMES. [On guard] I only suggest it's possible.

L. ANNE. Perhaps Poulder does.

JAMES. [Icily] I say nothin' about that.

L. ANNE. Oh! Do say something!

JAMES. I'm ashamed of you, Miss Anne, pumpin' me!

L. ANNE. [Reproachfully] I'm not pumpin'! I only want to make Poulder jump when I ask him.

JAMES. [Grinning] Try it on your own responsibility, then; don't bring me in!

L. ANNE. [Switching off] James, do you think there's going to be a bloody revolution?

JAMES. [Shocked] I shouldn't use that word, at your age.

L. ANNE. Why not? Daddy used it this morning to Mother. [Imitating] "The country's in an awful state, darling; there's going to be a bloody revolution, and we shall all be blown sky-high." Do you like Daddy?

JAMES. [Taken aback] Like Lord William? What do you think? We chaps would ha' done anything for him out there in the war.

L. ANNE. He never says that he always says he'd have done anything for you!

JAMES. Well – that's the same thing.

L. ANNE. It isn't – it's the opposite. What is class hatred, James?

JAMES. [Wisely] Ah! A lot o' people thought when the war was over there'd be no more o' that. [He sniggers] Used to amuse me to read in the papers about the wonderful unity that was comin'. I could ha' told 'em different.

L. ANNE. Why should people hate? I like everybody.

JAMES. You know such a lot o' people, don't you?

L. ANNE. Well, Daddy likes everybody, and Mother likes everybody, except the people who don't like Daddy. I bar Miss Stokes, of course; but then, who wouldn't?

JAMES. [With a touch of philosophy] That's right – we all bars them that tries to get something out of us.

L. ANNE. Who do you bar, James?

JAMES. Well – [Enjoying the luxury of thought] – Speaking generally, I bar everybody that looks down their noses at me. Out there in the trenches, there'd come a shell, and orf'd go some orficer's head, an' I'd think: That might ha' been me – we're all equal in the sight o' the stars. But when I got home again among the torfs, I says to meself: Out there, ye know, you filled a hole as well as me; but here you've put it on again, with mufti.

L. ANNE. James, are your breeches made of mufti?

JAMES. [Contemplating his legs with a certain contempt] Ah! Footmen were to ha' been off; but Lord William was scared we wouldn't get jobs in the rush. We're on his conscience, and it's on my conscience that I've been on his long enough – so, now I've saved a bit, I'm goin' to take meself orf it.

L. ANNE. Oh! Are you going? Where?

JAMES. [Assembling the last bottles] Out o' Blighty!

L. ANNE. Is a little blighter a little Englishman?

JAMES. [Embarrassed] Well-'e can be.

L. ANNE [Mining] James – we're quite safe down here, aren't we, in a revolution? Only, we wouldn't have fun. Which would you rather – be safe, or have fun?

JAMES. [Grimly] Well, I had my bit o' fun in the war.

L. ANNE. I like fun that happens when you're not looking.

JAMES. Do you? You'd ha' been just suited.

L. ANNE. James, is there a future life? Miss Stokes says so.

JAMES. It's a belief, in the middle classes.

L. ANNE. What are the middle classes?

JAMES. Anything from two 'undred a year to supertax.

L. ANNE. Mother says they're terrible. Is Miss Stokes middle class?

JAMES. Yes.

L. ANNE. Then I expect they are terrible. She's awfully virtuous, though, isn't she?

JAMES. 'Tisn't so much the bein' virtuous, as the lookin' it, that's awful.

L. ANNE. Are all the middle classes virtuous? Is Poulder?

JAMES. [Dubiously] Well. Ask him!

L. ANNE. Yes, I will. Look!

[From an empty bin on the ground level she picks up a lighted taper, – burnt almost to the end.]

JAMES. [Contemplating it] Careless!

L. Ate. Oh! And look! [She points to a rounded metal object lying in the bin, close to where the taper was] It's a bomb!

She is about to pick it up when JAMES takes her by the waist and puts her aside.

JAMES. [Sternly] You stand back, there! I don't like the look o' that!

L. ANNE. [With intense interest] Is it really a bomb? What fun!

JAMES. Go and fetch Poulder while I keep an eye on it.

L. ANNE. [On tiptoe of excitement] If only I can make him jump! Oh, James! we needn't put the light out, need we?

JAMES. No. Clear off and get him, and don't you come back.

L. ANNE. Oh! but I must! I found it!

JAMES. Cut along.

L. ANNE. Shall we bring a bucket?

JAMES. Yes. [ANNE flies off.]

[Gazing at the object] Near go! Thought I'd seen enough o'them to last my time. That little gas blighter! He looked a rum 'un, too – one o' these 'ere Bolshies.

[In the presence of this grim object the habits of the past are too much for him. He sits on the ground, leaning against one of the bottle baskets, keeping his eyes on the bomb, his large, lean, gorgeous body spread, one elbow on his plush knee. Taking out an empty pipe, he places it mechanically, bowl down, between his dips. There enter, behind him, as from a communication trench, POULDER, in swallow-tails, with LITTLE ANNE behind him.]

L. ANNE. [Peering round him – ecstatic] Hurrah! Not gone off yet! It can't – can it – while James is sitting on it?

POULDER. [Very broad and stout, with square shoulders, – a large ruddy face, and a small mouth] No noise, Miss. – James.

JAMES. Hallo!

POULDER. What's all this?

JAMES. Bomb!

POULDER. Miss Anne, off you go, and don't you —

L. ANNE. Come back again! I know! [She flies.]

JAMES. [Extending his hand with the pipe in it] See!

POULDER. [Severely] You've been at it again! Look here, you're not in the trenches now. Get up! What are your breeches goin' to be like? You might break a bottle any moment!

JAMES. [Rising with a jerk to a sort of "Attention!"] Look here, you starched antiquity, you and I and that bomb are here in the sight of the stars. If you don't look out I'll stamp on it and blow us all to glory! Drop your civilian swank!

POULDER. [Seeing red] Ho! Because you had the privilege of fightin' for your country you still think you can put it on, do you? Take up your wine! 'Pon my word, you fellers have got no nerve left!

[JAMES makes a sudden swoop, lifts the bomb and poises it in both hands.

POULDER recoils against a bin and gazes, at the object.]

JAMES. Put up your hands!

POULDER. I defy you to make me ridiculous.

JAMES. [Fiercely] Up with 'em!

[POULDER'S hands go up in an uncontrollable spasm, which he subdues almost instantly, pulling them down again.]

JAMES. Very good. [He lowers the bomb.]

POULDER. [Surprised] I never lifted 'em.

JAMES. You'd have made a first-class Boche, Poulder. Take the bomb yourself; you're in charge of this section.

POULDER. [Pouting] It's no part of my duty to carry menial objects; if you're afraid of it I'll send 'Enry.

JAMES. Afraid! You 'Op o' me thumb!

[From the "communication trench" appears LITTLE ANNE, followed by a thin, sharp, sallow-faced man of thirty-five or so, and another FOOTMAN, carrying a wine-cooler.]

L. ANNE. I've brought the bucket, and the Press.

PRESS. [In front of POULDER'S round eyes and mouth] Ah, major domo, I was just taking the names of the Anti-Sweating dinner. [He catches sight of the bomb in JAMES'S hand] By George! What A.1. irony! [He brings out a note-book and writes] "Highest class dining to relieve distress of lowest class-bombed by same!" Tipping! [He rubs his hands].

POULDER. [Drawing himself up] Sir? This is present! [He indicates ANNE with the flat of his hand.]

L. ANNE. I found the bomb.

PRESS. [Absorbed] By Jove! This is a piece of luck! [He writes.]

POULDER. [Observing him] This won't do — it won't do at all!

PRESS. [Writing-absorbed] "Beginning of the British Revolution!"

POULDER. [To JAMES] Put it in the cooler. 'Enry, 'old up the cooler. Gently! Miss Anne, get be'ind the Press.

JAMES. [Grimly — holding the bomb above the cooler] It won't be the Press that'll stop Miss Anne's goin' to 'Eaven if one o' this sort goes off. Look out! I'm goin' to drop it.

[ALL recoil. HENRY puts the cooler down and backs away.]

L. ANNE. [Dancing forward] Oh! Let me see! I missed all the war, you know!

[JAMES lowers the bomb into the cooler.]

POULDER. [Regaining courage – to THE PRESS, who is scribbling in his note-book] If you mention this before the police lay their hands on it, it'll be contempt o' Court.

PRESS. [Struck] I say, major domo, don't call in the police! That's the last resort. Let me do the Sherlocking for you. Who's been down here?

L. ANNE. The plumber's man about the gas – a little blighter we'd never seen before.

JAMES. Lives close by, in Royal Court Mews – No. 3. I had a word with him before he came down. Lemmy his name is.

PRESS. "Lemmy!" [Noting the address] Right-o!

L. ANNE. Oh! Do let me come with you!

POULDER. [Barring the way] I've got to lay it all before Lord William.

PRESS. Ah! What's he like?

POULDER. [With dignity] A gentleman, sir.

PRESS. Then he won't want the police in.

POULDER. Nor the Press, if I may go so far, as to say so.

PRESS. One to you! But I defy you to keep this from the Press, major domo: This is the most significant thing that has happened in our time. Guy Fawkes is nothing to it. The foundations of Society reeling! By George, it's a second Bethlehem!

[He writes.]

POULDER. [To JAMES] Take up your wine and follow me. 'Enry, bring the cooler. Miss Anne, precede us. [To THE PRESS] You defy me? Very well; I'm goin' to lock you up here.

PRESS. [Uneasy] I say this is medieval.

[He attempts to pass.]

POULDER. [Barring the way] Not so! James, put him up in that empty 'ock bin. We can't have dinner disturbed in any way.

JAMES. [Putting his hands on THE PRESS'S shoulders] Look here – go quiet! I've had a grudge against you yellow newspaper boys ever since the war – frothin' up your daily hate, an' makin' the Huns desperate. You nearly took my life five hundred times out there. If you squeal, I'm gain' to take yours once – and that'll be enough.

PRESS. That's awfully unjust. Im not yellow!

JAMES. Well, you look it. Hup.

PRESS. Little Lady-Anne, haven't you any authority with these fellows?

L. ANNE. [Resisting Poulard's pressure] I won't go! I simply must see James put him up!

PRESS. Now, I warn you all plainly – there'll be a leader on this.

[He tries to bolt but is seized by JAMES.]

JAMES. [Ironically] Ho!

PRESS. My paper has the biggest influence

JAMES. That's the one! Git up in that 'ock bin, and mind your feet among the claret.

PRESS. This is an outrage on the Press.

JAMES. Then it'll wipe out one by the Press on the Public – an' leave just a million over! Hup!

POULDER. 'Enry, give 'im an 'and.

[THE PRESS mounts, assisted by JAMES and HENRY.]

L. ANNE. [Ecstatic] It's lovely!

POULDER. [Nervously] Mind the '87! Mind!

JAMES. Mind your feet in Mr. Poulder's favourite wine!

[A WOMAN'S voice is heard, as from the depths of a cave, calling "Anne! Anne!"]

L. ANNE. [Aghast] Miss Stokes – I must hide!

[She gets behind POULDER. The three Servants achieve dignified positions in front of the bins. The voice comes nearer. THE PRESS sits dangling his feet, grinning. MISS STOKES appears. She is woman of forty-five and terribly good manners. Her greyish hair is rolled back off her forehead. She is in a high evening dress, and in the dim light radiates a startled composure.]

MISS STOKES. Poulder, where is Miss Anne?

[ANNE lays hold of the backs of his legs.]

POULDER. [Wincing] I am not in a position to inform you, Miss.

MISS S. They told me she was down here. And what is all this about a bomb?

POULDER. [Lifting his hand in a calming manner] The crisis is past; we have it in ice, Miss. 'Enry, show Miss Stokes! [HENRY indicates the cooler.]

MISS S. Good gracious! Does Lord William know?

POULDER. Not at present, Miss.

MISS S. But he ought to, at once.

POULDER. We 'ave 'ad complications.

MISS S. [Catching sight of the legs of THE PRESS] Dear me! What are those?

JAMES. [Gloomily] The complications.

[MISS STOKES pins up her glasses and stares at them.]

PRESS. [Cheerfully] Miss Stokes, would you kindly tell Lord William I'm here from the Press, and would like to speak to him?

MISS S. But – er – why are you up there?

JAMES. 'E got up out o' remorse, Miss.

MISS S. What do you mean, James?

PRESS. [Warmly] Miss Stokes, I appeal to you. Is it fair to attribute responsibility to an unsigned journalist – for what he has to say?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] Yes, when you've got 'im in a nice dark place.

MISS S. James, be more respectful! We owe the Press a very great debt.

JAMES. I'm goin' to pay it, Miss.

MISS S. [At a loss] Poulder, this is really most —

POULDER. I'm bound to keep the Press out of temptation, miss, till I've laid it all before Lord William. 'Enry, take up the cooler. James, watch 'im till we get clear, then bring on the rest of the wine and lock up. Now, Miss.

MISS S. But where is Anne?

PRESS. Miss Stokes, as a lady – !

MISS S. I shall go and fetch Lord William!

POULDER. We will all go, Miss.

L. ANNE. [Rushing out from behind his legs] No – me!

[She eludes MISS STOKES and vanishes, followed by that distracted but still well-mannered lady.]

POULDER. [Looking at his watch] 'Enry, leave the cooler, and take up the wine; tell Thomas to lay it out; get the champagne into ice, and 'ave Charles 'andy in the 'all in case some literary boulder comes punctual.

[HENRY takes up the wine and goes.]

PRESS. [Above his head] I say, let me down. This is a bit undignified, you know. My paper's a great organ.

POULDER. [After a moment's hesitation] Well – take 'im down, James; he'll do some mischief among the bottles.

JAMES. 'Op off your base, and trust to me.

[THE PRESS slides off the bin's edge, is received by JAMES, and not landed gently.]

POULDER. [Contemplating him] The incident's closed; no ill-feeling, I hope?

PRESS. No-o.

POULDER. That's right. [Clearing his throat] While we're waitin' for Lord William – if you're interested in wine – [Philosophically] you can read the history of the times in this cellar. Take 'ock: [He points to a bin] Not a bottle gone. German product, of course. Now, that 'ock is 'sa 'avin' the time of its life – maturin' grandly; got a wonderful chance. About the time we're bringin' ourselves to drink it, we shall be havin' the next great war. With luck that 'ock may lie there another quarter of a century, and a sweet pretty wine it'll be. I only hope I may be here to drink it. Ah! [He shakes his head] – but look at claret! Times are hard on claret. We're givin' it an awful doin'. Now, there's a Ponty Canny [He points to a bin] if we weren't so 'opelessly allied with France, that wine would have a reasonable future. As it is – none! We drink it up and up; not more than sixty dozen left. And where's its equal to come from for a dinner wine – ah! I ask you? On the other hand, port is steady; made in a little country, all but the cobwebs and the old boot flavour; guaranteed by the British Nary; we may 'ope for the best with port. Do you drink it?

PRESS. When I get the chance.

POULDER. Ah! [Clears his throat] I've often wanted to ask: What do they pay you – if it's not indelicate?

[THE PRESS shrugs his shoulders.]

Can you do it at the money?

[THE PRESS shakes his head.] Still – it's an easy life! I've regretted sometimes that I didn't have a shot at it myself; influencin' other people without disclosin' your identity – something very attractive about that. [Lowering his voice] Between man and man, now-what do you think of the situation of the country – these processions of the unemployed – the Red Flag an' the Marsillaisy in the streets – all this talk about an upheaval?

PRESS. Well, speaking as a Socialist —

POULDER. [Astounded] Why; I thought your paper was Tory!

PRESS. So it is. That's nothing!

POULDER. [Open-mouthed] Dear me! [Pointing to the bomb] Do you really think there's something in this?

JAMES. [Sepulchrally] 'Igh explosive.

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Too much, anyway, to let it drop.

[A pleasant voice calls "Poulder! Hallo!".]

POULDER. [Forming a trumpet with his hand] Me Lord!

[As LORD WILLIAM appears, JAMES, overcome by reminiscences; salutes, and is mechanically answered. LORD WILLIAM has "charm." His hair and moustache are crisp and just beginning to grizzle. His bearing is free, easy, and only faintly armoured. He will go far to meet you any day. He is in full evening dress.]

LORD W. [Cheerfully] I say, Poulder, what have you and James been doing to the Press? Liberty of the Press – it isn't what it was, but there is a limit. Where is he?

[He turns to Jams between whom and himself there is still the freemasonry of the trenches.]

JAMES. [Pointing to POULDER] Be'ind the parapet, me Lord.

[THE PRESS mopes out from where he has involuntarily been. screened by POULDER, who looks at JAMES severely. LORD WILLIAM hides a smile.]

PRESS. Very glad to meet you, Lord William. My presence down here is quite involuntary.

LORD W. [With a charming smile] I know. The Press has to put its – er – to go to the bottom of everything. Where's this bomb, Poulder? Ah!

[He looks into the wine cooler.]

PRESS. [Taking out his note-book] Could I have a word with you on the crisis, before dinner, Lord William?

LORD W. It's time you and James were up, Poulder. [Indicating the cooler] Look after this; tell Lady William I'll be there in a minute.

POULDER. Very good, me Lord.

[He goes, followed by JAMES carrying the cooler.] [As THE PRESS turns to look after them, LORD WILLIAM catches sight of his back.]

LORD W. I must apologise, sir. Can I brush you?

PRESS. [Dusting himself] Thanks; it's only behind. [He opens his note-book] Now, Lord William, if you'd kindly outline your views on the national situation; after such a narrow escape from death, I feel they might have a moral effect. My paper, as you know, is concerned with – the deeper aspect of things. By the way, what do you value your house and collection at?

LORD W. [Twisting his little mustache] Really: I can't! Really!

PRESS. Might I say a quarter of a million-lifted in two seconds and a half-hundred thousand to the second. It brings it home, you know.

LORD W. No, no; dash it! No!

PRESS. [Disappointed] I see – not draw attention to your property in the present excited state of public feeling? Well, suppose we approach it from the viewpoint of the Anti-Sweating dinner. I have the list of guests – very weighty!

LORD W. Taken some lifting-wouldn't they?

PRESS. [Seriously] May I say that you designed the dinner to soften the tension, at this crisis? You saw that case, I suppose, this morning, of the woman dying of starvation in Bethnal Green?

LORD W. [Desperately] Yes-yes! I've been horribly affected. I always knew this slump would come after the war, sooner or later.

PRESS. [Writing] "... had predicted slump."

LORD W. You see, I've been an Anti-Sweating man for years, and I thought if only we could come together now...

PRESS. [Nodding] I see – I see! Get Society interested in the Sweated, through the dinner. I have the menu here. [He produces it.]

LORD W. Good God, man – more than that! I want to show the people that we stand side by side with them, as we did in the trenches. The whole thing's too jolly awful. I lie awake over it.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling] One moment, please. I'll just get that down – "Too jolly awful – lies awake over it. Was wearing a white waistcoat with pearl buttons." [At a sign of resentment from his victim.]

I want the human touch, Lord William – it's everything in my paper. What do you say about this attempt to bomb you?

LORD W. Well, in a way I think it's d – d natural

PRESS. [Scribbling] "Lord William thought it d – d natural."

LORD W. [Overhearing] No, no; don't put that down. What I mean is, I should like to get hold of those fellows that are singing the Marseillaise about the streets – fellows that have been in the war – real sports they are, you know – thorough good chaps at bottom – and say to them: "Have a feeling heart, boys; put yourself in my position." I don't believe a bit they'd want to bomb me then.

[He walks up and down.]

PRESS. [Scribbling and muttering] "The idea, of brotherhood – " D'you mind my saying that? Word brotherhood – always effective – always —

[He writes.]

LORD E. [Bewildered] "Brotherhood!" Well, it's pure accident that I'm here and they're there. All the same, I can't pretend to be starving. Can't go out into Hyde Park and stand on a tub, can I? But if I could only show them what I feel – they're such good chaps – poor devils.

PRESS. I quite appreciate! [He writes] "Camel and needle's eye." You were at Eton and Oxford? Your constituency I know. Clubs? But I can get all that. Is it your view that Christianity is on the up-grade, Lord William?

LORD W. [Dubious] What d'you mean by Christianity – loving – kindness and that? Of course I think that dogma's got the knock.

[He walks.]

PRESS. [Writing] "Lord William thought dogma had got the knock." I should like you just to develop your definition of Christianity. "Loving – kindness" strikes rather a new note.

LORD W. New? What about the Sermon on the Mount?

PRESS. [Writing] "Refers to Sermon on Mount." I take it you don't belong to any Church, Lord William?

LORD W. [Exasperated] Well, really – I've been baptised and that sort of thing. But look here —

PRESS. Oh! you can trust me – I shan't say anything that you'll regret. Now, do you consider that a religious revival would help to quiet the country?

LORD W. Well, I think it would be a deuced, good thing if everybody were a bit more kind.

PRESS. Ah! [Musing] I feel that your views are strikingly original, Lord William. If you could just open out on them a little more? How far would you apply kindness in practice?

LORD W. Can you apply it in theory?

PRESS. I believe it is done. But would you allow yourself to be blown up with impunity?

LORD W. Well, that's a bit extreme. But I quite sympathise with this chap. Imagine yourself in his shoes. He sees a huge house, all these bottles; us swilling them down; perhaps he's got a starving wife, or consumptive kids.

PRESS. [Writing and murmuring] Um-m! "Kids."

LORD W. He thinks: "But for the grace of God, there swill I. Why should that blighter have everything and I nothing?" and all that.

PRESS. [Writing] "And all that." [Eagerly] Yes?

LORD W. And gradually – you see – this contrast – becomes an obsession with him. "There's got to be an example made," he thinks; and – er – he makes it, don't you know?

PRESS. [Writing] Ye-es? And – when you're the example?

LORD W. Well, you feel a bit blue, of course. But my point is that you quite see it.

PRESS. From the other world. Do you believe in a future life, Lord William? The public took a lot of interest in the question, if you remember, at the time of the war. It might revive at any moment, if there's to be a revolution.

LORD W. The wish is always father to the thought, isn't it?

PRESS. Yes! But – er – doesn't the question of a future life rather bear on your point about kindness? If there isn't one – why be kind?

LORD W. Well, I should say one oughtn't to be kind for any motive – that's self-interest; but just because one feels it, don't you know.

PRESS. [Writing vigorously] That's very new – very new!

LORD W. [Simply] You chaps are wonderful.

PRESS. [Doubtfully] You mean we're – we're —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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