

HERBERT JENKINS

THE NIGHT
CLUB

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The Night Club

CHAPTER I

FORMING THE NIGHT CLUB

The idea originated with Bindle, who is never so happy as when listening to or telling a story. Sooner or later he will so guide conversation as to challenge from someone a reminiscence, or failing that, he will himself assume the burden of responsibility, and tell of how he engineered one of his "little jokes," as he calls them.

"I likes to 'ear 'im tellin' the tale," Bindle remarked one evening, as we sat in Dick Little's flat. Dick had just finished an extravagant and highly-coloured account of an Oxford "rag." "Fancy young gentlemen be'avin' like that," Bindle continued, "instead o' learnin' to be parsons. P'raps that's why they looks such gentle Jims when they gets into a stiff collar," and Bindle buried a wink in his tankard.

A number of us had formed the habit of drifting into Dick Little's flat in Chelsea on Sunday evenings for a smoke, a drink and a yarn. That was in Dick's bachelor days and when he was working night and day at "Tims" (St. Timothy's Hospital). There would be Jocelyn Dare, the writer and inveterate hater of publishers, Jack Carruthers, who tolerated everybody except Mr. Lloyd George, sometimes Tom Little, Dick's brother, and about a dozen others, including a lot of men from "Tims."

One Sunday evening in May, when the air was heavily-scented with blackthorn and laburnum, Bindle and I arrived on Dick Little's doorstep within two seconds of each other.

"Hullo, J.B.," I hailed as he was closing the outer door of the mansions. We always call him "J.B.," following Dick Little's lead.

"Cheerio, sir," he responded, holding the door open for me to pass and, giving vent to an elaborate sigh of relief, added: "I'm glad to get in, that I am. I never feels safe till I gets 'ere. Lord! 'ow them young women do make eyes at me. I s'pose it's the Spring. It ain't safe for me to be out, it ain't really, sir."

We were the first arrivals, and it was during the next ten minutes that Bindle made his proposal.

"Why shouldn't we 'ave a little club, sir, wot does nothink but tell the tale?" he asked.

That was the inception of the whole idea. Dick grasped hold of it eagerly. He is a doctor and doing his best to kill himself with hospital work, and I think he saw in Bindle's suggestion a welcome change after a strenuous week's work. We discussed the matter during the next ten minutes, and, when the other fellows arrived, they were told of the new order of things and, with one voice, acclaimed Bindle a genius. It must be confessed that the men from "Tims" are unrivalled in their capacity for acclamation – they revel in the robustious. It frequently involves Dick Little in difficulties with his neighbours, especially with a choleric old general who lives in the flat beneath.

"I always wanted a night club," explained Bindle when he had disentangled his limbs from the eager hands that had hoisted him shoulder-high. "It 'ud sort o' cheer Mrs. B. up to know that 'er ole man was goin' to 'ell quicker than wot she thought."

After that it was always "The Night Club." We seemed to adopt the name as a matter of course.

We arranged to meet on Sunday evenings at nine o'clock. Each member of the Club was liable to be called upon to tell a story, after being given a reasonable notice.

"Didn't we ought to 'ave rules, sir," enquired Bindle of Dick Little.

"Once you start making rules you are undone," broke in Tom Little, "for you have to frame other rules to modify those already made. At Oxford –"

"Is it to be a cock and hen club?" interrupted Carruthers.

"A cock an' wot club, sir?" enquired Bindle, pausing in the act of lighting his pipe. "A cock an' wot club?"

"Are ladies to be – " Carruthers got no further. Bindle deliberately replaced the match in the box, which with his pipe he returned to his jacket pocket. Then with great solemnity and deliberation he rose and walked towards the door.

"Hullo! J.B.," cried Dick Little. "What's up?"

"If you're goin' to 'ave 'ens, sir, this 'ere cock's off, see?"

"Come back, you silly ass," laughed Tom Little.

Bindle paused irresolutely and looked from face to face. "Is it 'ens or no 'ens, sir?" he enquired of Dick Little.

"Why, no hens, of course," shouted Jim Colman, one of Tim's men, giving Bindle a thump between the shoulders that would have made most men wince.

"Right-o, gentlemen; then this 'ere cock withdraws 'is resignation, an' all's serene again," and Bindle returned to his seat and the occupation of kindling his pipe.

Thus it was that women were barred from the Night Club.

The first meeting, however, ended in a fiasco. A fellow named Roger Blint had been called upon to tell a yarn, which proved him to be utterly devoid of narrative skill. It was something about a man who was jilted by a girl and, in consequence, went to the war, returning a few months later with his breast a rainbow of ribbons and his pockets jingling with medals, crosses and stars. We were all much depressed.

After the others had gone Bindle, Dick Little and I conferred together, and it was decided by a majority of two to one that I was first to hear the stories, write them out and read them to the club.

I protested that I was too busy; but Bindle had finally over-ruled my expostulations.

"No, one ain't never too busy to do a little bit more," he said. "I once 'ad a special kind o' performin' fleas, wot was the busiest things I ever seen; yet they wasn't too busy to give me a nip or two now and then. You got to do it, sir," and I felt I had.

We developed into a curiously motley crowd. One night Bindle brought Ginger along, and Ginger had remarked "I don't 'old wiv them sort o' clubs." He refused all other invitations. We had among us a retired policeman, a man who kept a coffee-stall, Angell Herald, the famous publicity agent, the Honourable Anthony Charles Windover (now Lord Windover), and many others. Had we accepted all the nominations, we should have been an uncomfortably mixed crowd. Dick Little was particularly anxious to introduce a "Polish" barber whose name was Schmidt, on the strength of his having exhibited in his shop-window the following notice: —

"I am an alleged Russian subject,"

but we had blackballed the worthy Schmidt.

"Because a cove says a funny thing," remarked Bindle, "doesn't always mean 'e's funny. Sometimes 'e can't 'elp it, poor chap."

As a result of the story about Sallie, Jack Carruthers' sister, she became the only woman ever admitted to the Night Club. There was not a man in the assembly but was desperately in love with her from the moment he heard the tale. Never was a queen more deferred to and fussed over than Sallie. To Bindle she was "the sport of sports." "She ain't always flapping 'er petticoats," he said admiringly. "Yer wouldn't know you 'ad a bit o' skirt 'ere except when yer looks at 'er face."

Bindle was Sallie's cavalier. If the atmosphere seemed to get too thick with smoke, it was he who threw up the window, or propped open the door until it cleared. When Jack Carruthers was not present, it was always Bindle who put Sallie into her taxi; it was an understood thing. One night the Boy, quite unthinkingly, endeavoured to usurp Bindle's prerogative. Bindle had looked him up and

down for a moment and remarked cheerily: "All right, 'Mr. 'Indenburg,' you jest wait till I've finished, then I'll come and take you 'ome."

Bindle is a journeyman pantechnicon-man, with an unquenchable thirst for fun. He is small, bald-headed, red-nosed, cheery. To him life is one long-drawn-out joke. He is blessed with a wife and brother-in-law (Alfred Hearty, the Fulham greengrocer), whose godliness is overpowering. Bindle is a cockney by birth and in feeling. He loves mischief for its own sake; but underneath there is always gentleness and consideration for the unfortunate, and a kindly philosophy without which laughter is an insult to life.

Of the other members of The Night Club little need be said. Most of them are doing war-work in some shape or form. Windover is a captain on the Staff, Carruthers is in the R.N.R., Dare is in munitions, his heart "plucked" him for the army, and the rest are doing their bit to the best of their ability. To one and all Sunday is a relaxation from a strenuous week of work, and the presiding spirit of our assemblies is our unanimously-elected chairman, Joseph Bindle.

Although Bindle is a laughing philosopher, he has several streaks of granite in his composition: among them independence. One of the first questions raised was that of drinks. Dick Little, whose generosity is embarrassing, had said that was his affair.

"Very well, sir," was Bindle's comment; "then you breaks up the Night Club."

Enquiry elicited from Bindle the announcement that unless we all paid our share, he "wasn't taking anythink." From that time it became an understood thing that each member became responsible for one evening's refreshments. We had fought Bindle as long as possible, but he was adamant.

It was quite by chance we discovered later that when his turn came to pay, he had worked overtime for a whole week so that Mrs. Bindle should not go short on account of his pleasures.

Bindle had suggested that when the time came a selection of the stories might be printed. It was explained to him that short stories do not sell; the British public does not like, and will not read, them.

Bindle had pondered over this for a while and, finally, had said with decision: "Then we'll make 'em read ours. Me an' Mrs. B. don't neither of us seem to fancy cold mutton, an' when there's a bit over you should jest see wot she can do with it. She can turn it into anythink from stewed rabbit to mince pies." Then turning to me he continued: "You done me proud in that other little 'ymn book o' yours, sir, although 'Earty and Mrs. B. don't seem quite to 'ave recovered from the shock o' bein' famous, and now you can tell all about our Night Club.

"You jest tell about Miss Sallie, sir, ah' Young 'Indenburg, the Cherub (Bindle's name for Angell Herald), an' Mr. Gawd Blast (Jocelyn Dare); why them alone 'ud make any book famous. Then you might add jest a sort of 'int, yer know, sir, that I'd be in it an' then, wot-o!" Bindle did a few fancy steps towards his tankard and took a good pull. "With Miss Sallie, Young 'Indenburg, an' me, sir, you got the real thing."

That settled the matter, and here is the book, short stories disguised as a book of consecutive interest, just as Mrs. Bindle's cold mutton masquerades as "stewed rabbit" or "mince pies." It's a fraud, a palpable fraud, but as Bindle says, we all keep "a-poppin' up like U-boats, that people'll sort o' get fond of us."

Many will say I should have been firmer; but the man who can withstand Bindle when he is set upon having his own way is a being of finer moral fibre than I.

The hour, when it came, for deciding which stories should be included and which omitted, would, I thought, be the last of the Night Club. Nobody agreed upon anything. Sallie refused to allow the story to be told of how she did what the whole power of Germany has failed to do – tricked the British Navy. At the mere suggestion of printing even a covert reference to himself, the Boy became almost hysterical. Angell Herald, on the other hand, felt that all his yarns should go in, and said so, intimating also that he had several others. Furthermore he hinted that he might get us some advertisements to go at the end of the volume, *provided* it satisfied him!

Finally it was agreed that Dare and I should decide what stories were to be included, and from our verdict there was to be no appeal. Bindle's last words on the subject were —

"You jest put me an' Miss Sallie on the cover an' you'll see."

CHAPTER II

THE COMING OF SALLIE

When the Night Club was formed it was definitely agreed that it should be for men only, like the best stories and the most delightful women; yet at the third sitting Sallie Carruthers became the one and only woman member. The circumstance was so unexpected that it can be understood only as a result of a thorough description of Sallie, and the difficulty is to know where to begin – the end is always the same, a precipitate falling-in-love with her.

It is all very tedious for Sallie, who does not seem to like being fallen-in-love-with. To use her own expression, "It spoils it." What it is that it spoils she does not seem able to explain, and if pressed she replies despairingly, "Oh! everything."

To a man Sallie is an enigma. She seems desirous of rebuking Nature. She claims from a man comradeship and equality, and he who is not prepared to concede this had better keep out of her way. If some poor wretch, not knowing Sallie's views, happen to be with her in the country and pause to help her over a stile, he never does so more than once. Sallie's eyes will smile her thanks and convey a reproach at the same time. On the other hand, in a drawing-room or at a theatre, Sallie would not be likely to overlook the slightest omission.

There is about her a quality that is as personal as it is irresistible. I have never known her fail to get what she wanted, just as I have never known her to appear to want what she gets. If Sallie asks me to take her up the river on the Sunday I have invited Aunt Jane to lunch, I explain things to Sallie, and there the matter appears to end; yet on that self-same Sunday Sallie and I go up the river, and on the Monday I have a letter from Aunt Jane saying that I am quite right to take every care of an internal chill!

To describe Sallie is impossible. She has very large, expressive, grey eyes, exceedingly long lashes, carmine lips, nondescriptive features, masses of dark brown hair that grows low down upon her forehead, and the quality of attracting the attention of everybody in her vicinity. She dresses well, is the victim of moods, seems to eat nothing, and is as straight as the Boat Race.

With a word or a glance she can annihilate or intoxicate. I call to mind one occasion, when what might have been a delightful dinner was being ruined by a bounder, who monopolised the conversation with pointless stories. Sallie waited her chance.

"I have a grandfather," began the bounder.

"Have you?" enquired Sallie in a tone full of sweetness and meaning.

The man subsided.

One day Sallie rang me up, and by the impatient "There? There?? There??? Oh, bother!" I knew that something important was in the air.

"I am," I replied.

"What?"

"Here, of course," I replied.

"I've got it," said Sallie; "I've got it."

"Heavens!" I responded. "How did you catch it? Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"You're not a bit funny. Aren't you glad I've got it?" she queried.

"Certainly, very glad if you are."

"Jack gave it to me."

"Really? Has he got it too? What is it?"

"A car, of course!"

Now this was characteristic of Sallie. I did not even know that she desired a car; probably her brother Jack, who gives her everything but the good advice she so sadly needs, was as ignorant as

I. Most likely he had planned the whole thing as a surprise, just as I once gave Sallie a punt as a "surprise," and learned later that for a month previously she had been taking lessons in punting. But that's just Sallie.

"It's so wonderful," Sallie went on to explain. "It does such funny things. Sometimes it barks like a dog – (I shivered, I knew what that meant for the car) – and sometimes it purrs just like Wivvles." Wivvles is a Persian kitten of no manners and less – but Wivvles can wait.

At times Sallie is very trying, although unconsciously. She has a habit of taking the first syllable of her friends' surnames and adding a "y." Windover, for instance, becomes "Winny." Poor Graves, who is very fat and moist, she calls "Gravy," and it hurts him just as it hurts dear old Skillington, who is long and learned, to hear himself referred to as "Skilly." It would, however, hurt them both far more if Sallie were allowed to guess their real feelings.

Having to some extent explained Sallie, I must proceed to tell the story that resulted in her becoming a member of the Night Club.

Bindle had arranged that I should tell the first story, and in honour of Jack Carruthers, who is Dick Little's particular pal, and a foundation member of the Club, I decided to tell how Sallie had once personated an admiral's daughter and what came of it.

I

On coming down to breakfast one June morning I found awaiting me a telegram. It was from Jack Carruthers at Sheerness, and read: —

"got hilda here bring malcolm sallie dora for week end cruise meet you sheerness pier four oclock friday jack"

"I'll be damned if I do," I cried aloud.

"I b-b-beg your p-p-pardon, sir?" said Peake, who entered at that moment bearing before him the eternal eggs, bacon and kidneys. Peake is entirely devoid of culinary imagination.

"I remarked, Peake," I replied with great distinctness, "that I'll be damned if I do."

"Yes, sir," he responded, as he placed the dish of reiterations on the table before me; "b-b-b-but you said 'adlock on W-w-Wednesdays and F-f-fridays, sir: this is only T-t-tuesday."

"I wasn't referring to fish, Peake," I said severely, "but to Mr. Carruthers and the *Hilda*. He has invited me to take another cruise with him."

A look of fear came into Peake's eyes. I had recently threatened to take him with me on the next occasion that I sailed with Carruthers. Peake is an excellent servant; but he has three great shortcomings: he has no imagination, stutters like a machine-gun, and is a wretched sailor. For stuttering he has tried every known cure from the Demosthenian pebble to patent medicines, and for sea-sickness he has swallowed the contents of innumerable boxes and bottles. The result is that he stutters as much as ever, and during a Channel crossing is about as useful as a fishing-rod. It has never come to my knowledge that he has sought a cure for his lack of imagination.

"I b-b-beg pardon, sir. I thought you m-m-meant the breakfast. S-s-shall I pack your things, sir?" he questioned, as he stood regarding me wistfully, his hand on the handle of the door.

"What I said, Peake, was that I'll be damned if I do, which does not involve packing. You will not pack my things, and please don't again suggest doing so; it annoys me intensely. That is all."

Peake withdrew with the air of a man who has heard, but does not believe. I was convinced that he was already planning how he should spend his time during my absence. I ate my breakfast in silence, read the shipping casualties to steady my determination to decline Carruthers' invitation, and smoked four cigarettes.

Being unable to get my mind away from the *Hilda* and her skipper, I determined, therefore, to go out at once and send him a telegram of curt refusal. With my fifth cigarette between my lips I set forth.

The reason for my determination was Dora coupled with Malcolm. Dora bores me, and when Malcolm tries to flirt with her, which he does in a manner that reminds me of a cod making love to a trout, I become demoralised. Dora is Sallie's pal and the wife of some man or other whom I have met and forgotten: no one would think of burdening his mind with anything belonging to Dora that she is not actually wearing at the moment. Dora is extremely modish and regards a husband as she would a last year's frock.

In the Earl's Court Road I encountered Sallie. She was engaged in meditatively prodding with the forefinger of her right hand the lifeless carcass of a chicken. I approached unseen.

"We should reverence the dead, my friend," I remarked gravely. She turned suddenly, with a little cry of pleasure that digested the kidneys and dismissed Malcolm and the *Hilda* from my overburdened mind.

"Oh, I *am* glad to see you," she said, "awfully glad. Can you remember whether a good chicken should be blue or yellow? I know it's *one* of the primary colours, because that's why I remember it?" And she knit her brows as, with a puzzled expression of doubt, she regarded the row of trussed birds upon the poulterer's slab.

"You are confusing the primary colours with the primary pigments. They – "

"Please try and help me," she pleaded; "I'm so worried. The housekeeper has gone to see a sick relative, and I have to forage for food. It's awful. I hate eating."

Sallie looked so wretched, and her grey eyes so luminous and pathetic, that I took the chickens in hand, purchased two saffron-coloured specimens at a venture, and we proceeded to the fishmonger's.

Sallie's shopping completed, I told her of Jack's wire and my determination.

"Oh! but we *must* go," she said with conviction. "We can't let him down."

I explained that I could not get away.

"I wish I were a man," Sallie sighed mournfully, and gazed down at her very dainty tailor-made skirt, a habit of hers when she wants to engage upon something a woman should not do. Then turning half round and dancing before me backwards, she burst out, "But I should so love it. Do take me, *pleeeeeeeeease*."

"Sallie," I said, "there's an old lady opposite who is struck speechless by your salvation tactics."

"Oh! bother the old lady," she laughed. "Now we'll go and telegraph."

When I left Sallie, I had telegraphed an acceptance to Jack and wired to Malcolm. Sallie composed telegrams, which must have caused them some surprise on account of their extreme cordiality. We then parted, Sallie to call on Dora, I to telephone to Peake that he might after all pack my bag, although there were three days in which to do it. As a matter of fact I did not feel equal to that I-never-doubted-you'd-go-sir look in his eyes.

II

Victoria Station had been agreed upon as the rendezvous, and there we met. Sallie looked demurely trim and appropriately dressed. Dora seemed to have got confused between a yachting-trip and a garden-party, and had struck an unhappy medium between the two. Dora has what is known to women as "a French figure"; but what to man remains a mystery; she also has fair hair and a something in the eye that makes men look at her with interest and women with disapproval.

Malcolm is all legs and arms and sketch-book. He was quite appropriately dressed in a Norfolk knickerbocker suit, with a straw hat and an umbrella – appropriately dressed, that is, for anything but yachting. Malcolm is a marine-painter, and what he does not know about the sea and boats need not concern either yachtsman or artist. He is tall and thin, with the temper of an angel, the caution of a good sailor and the courage of a lion. He waves his arms about like semaphores, rates woman lower than a barge, and never fails to earn the respect of sailormen.

Malcolm is a man of strange capacities and curious limitations. Anybody will do anything for him, porters carry his luggage with no thought of tips, editors publish his drawings, whether they want to or no, people purchase his pictures without in the least understanding them, and, finally, everybody accepts him without comment, much as they do a Bank Holiday or an eclipse.

Sallie and Dora between them had only a small valise, whereas Malcolm carried a sketch-book and an umbrella. He, as I, was depending upon Carruthers for all save a tooth-brush.

There was the inevitable delay on the line, and we were over an hour late. Sallie was in a fever of excitement lest the *Hilda* should sail without us. Malcolm, with that supreme lack of tact so characteristic of him, explained what a ticklish business it was getting out of Sheerness Harbour under sail with the wind in its present quarter. He thought that in all probability the auxiliary motor had broken down, and that the *Hilda* would have to depend upon canvas to get out, in which case she must have sailed half-an-hour before.

When we eventually drew into the station, out of the train, down the platform, through the gates, into the street, sped Malcolm, and we, like "panting time toiled after him in vain." He waved his umbrella to us to hurry, not knowing that Dora has a deplorably short wind. On he tore, and finally disappeared through the pier-gates without, as we afterwards found, paying his toll, a privilege he had generously delegated to us. When we in turn passed through the gates, it was to find Malcolm hysterically waving his umbrella, apparently at the Medway guardship. Suddenly the truth dawned upon us, the *Hilda* had sailed. Probably Carruthers had not received the telegram.

Arrived at the pierhead we saw the *Hilda* off the Isle of Grain, two miles distant, slowly slipping out of the Medway against the tide with the aid of her auxiliary motor. The sight was one of the most depressing that I have ever experienced. We looked at each other blankly.

"It's the cup of Tantalus," I murmured, with classical resignation.

"It's that damned auxiliary motor," muttered the practical Malcolm.

"Commoning faire?" enquired Dora, who is inclined occasionally to lapse into French on the strength of her figure. "Commoning faire?"

"Noo verrong," replied Malcolm in what he conceives to be the Gallic tongue.

I made no remark, but with Sallie stood idly watching a steam-pinnace approaching the pier-head from the Medway guardship that lay moored directly opposite.

"I know!" Sallie suddenly said, and I knew that she really did know. There are moments when I am at a loss to understand why I do not run away with Sallie and marry her in spite of herself, merely as a speculative investment. She is exquisitely ornamental, and her utility equals her æsthetic qualities; more would be impossible.

At Sallie's exclamation Dora and Malcolm drew towards us.

"Tell me the name of an admiral," Sallie cried, her large, grey eyes diverted from epic contemplation of the universe to a lyric mischievousness. "I want an admiral."

"Try a lieutenant to begin with," Malcolm suggested, and was withered.

"An admiral," said Dora. "Nelson; he was an admiral, wasn't – ?"

"Van Tromp, Blake, Benbow, Villeneuve, Collingwood, St. Vincent, Cochrane – " glibly responded Malcolm.

As the responses were uttered at the same time, Sallie probably heard little of what was said. Suddenly becoming very calm, she addressed herself to Malcolm.

"I want to know the name of an English admiral of the present day. Are there any?"

"Plenty," responded Malcolm. "Crosstrees (I dare not give the real name), First Sea Lord, May, Meux, Jellicoe, Beresford, Scott, Beatty."

"Is Admiral Crosstrees married?" queried Sallie calmly. "Has he grown-up daughters? Is he old?"

"Any First Sea Lord who has not grown-up daughters has evaded his responsibilities as an officer and a gentleman," I remarked.

Suddenly Sallie took command. Motioning us back, she went to the extreme end of the pier and looked down. A moment later, the white top of a naval cap appeared above the edge, followed by a fair face and five feet six of a sub-lieutenant. Sallie addressed herself to him, and, taking advantage of his obvious confusion, said: "Will you please take us out to that yacht," pointing to the *Hilda*. "She has gone without us, and – well, we want to get on board."

When the sub. had recovered from Sallie's smile and her carnation tint, he stammered his regret.

"I'm most awfully sorry; but I'm here to take liberty men aboard. I'm, I'm, afraid I can't, otherwise I would with er – er – er –"

"What are liberty men?" questioned Sallie, looking at him with grey-eyed gravity.

"Men who have been ashore on leave," was the response.

"Can you signal to that?" asked Sallie with guile, nodding at the guardship.

"I beg pardon," replied the bewildered sub, fast breaking up beneath Sallie's gaze.

"Does the captain know the First Sea Lord, Admiral Crosstrees?"

"I – I don't know," he replied, "I –"

"I am Miss Crosstrees. Will you please tell me who you are. I should like to know, because you are the first officer I have met who has been discourteous to me. I will not trouble you further," and she moved away like an outraged Mrs. Siddons.

"I – I'm awfully sorry, Miss Crosstrees. I didn't know – of course – if you can get down. I will most certainly –" He collapsed into confused silence.

"You will take us then?" Sallie questioned, approaching two steps nearer to him.

"Certainly: but er – er – can you – er?"

Sallie looked down. A perpendicular iron ladder led down to the pinnacle some thirty feet below. It was not pleasant for a woman.

"Will you go down and – and –" faltered Sallie. He was a nice youth, who understood and disappeared, I after him. Then came Sallie, easily and naturally as if accustomed to such ladders all her life. Dora followed, almost hysterical with fear, and finally came Malcolm, with his umbrella and the valise in one hand and his sketch-book between his teeth. I could see the men were impressed with his performance.

I did not at all like the adventure. It might end very unpleasantly for some of us, and the "some," I knew, would be Malcolm and me. I was by no means reassured when I saw that the sub. was steering the pinnacle directly for the guardship. Did he suspect? I racked my brains to try and recollect if the First Sea Lord were married, if he had a family, if – . It was as if from far away that I heard the sub, hailing the guardship through a megaphone.

"Admiral Crosstrees' daughter wishes to be put aboard that yacht, sir. Am I –"

"Certainly," came the reply, as the officer of the watch came to the side and saluted. Hands bobbed up from everywhere, and it seemed as if a dead ship had suddenly been galvanised into life. Sallie's bow and smile were much appreciated, every man taking it unto himself. That is Sallie's way. She can slay a regiment or a ship's company with a glance, whilst another woman is exhausting herself in trying to enlist the interest of a stockbroker.

Out we rushed after the *Hilda*. Sallie, now that she had gained her point, became absorbed in contemplating the Isle of Grain, and watching the white wake of the pinnacle. Occasionally a slight, half-sad, half-contemplative smile would flit across her features. She had forgotten everything – yachts, pinnaces, subs, and was just alone with the things that mattered, the sea, the sky, and the green fields.

Dora chatted with the sub., whose eyes repeatedly wandered to where Sallie was standing quite oblivious to his presence. Malcolm was in deep converse with one of the crew, whilst I watched the others, especially Sallie. I find it difficult to keep my eyes off Sallie when she is within their range. She is an interesting study for a man with the chilled physique of a St. Anthony; for the rest of us she is a maddening problem.

The *Hilda* was labouring dully, heavily through the broken water, whilst we raced, bobbed, jumped and tore after her.

Malcolm hailed her through the megaphone, and there came back in Carruthers' drawling voice: "Awfully glad you've come!"

The bowman brought the pinnacle dexterously under the *Hilda's* port quarter, and Sallie clutched at the yacht's shrouds and sprang aboard. The sub. watched her with frank admiration. Sallie does everything in the open most thoroughly well. I have seen her fall flat on her face at the winning-post in her determination not to be beaten by a longer-legged and swifter opponent. How truly admirable she was, struck us all very vividly as we strove to hoist, pull, and push Dora, aboard. In spite of its æsthetic glory, Dora's figure possesses very obvious limitations in the matter of surmounting obstacles.

Immediately she was on board, Sallie went up to Carruthers and gravely shook hands (Sallie hates being kissed, I speak from careful observation), and drew him aside.

"Jack, until that steam launch is out of sight I'm Miss Crosstrees, daughter of the First Sea Lord. Don't let any of the crew give me away."

"Or the guardship will sink us," I added.

Carruthers looked puzzled, but with a cheery, "all right, Sallie, my bonnie," he went to the side to thank the sub. Carruthers would cheerfully imperil his immortal soul for Sallie. The sub. was brought aboard, and we all drank to the eyes that are brightest, in 190 °Champagne, I have forgotten the brand. The sub. was very obvious, and we all guessed the eyes he pledged – all save Sallie.

As the sub. stood at the side preparatory to descending into the pinnacle, Sallie held out her hand, which he took as if it had been some saintly relic.

"I shall always remember your kindness, Mr. – " (I dare not give his name for fear of the Admiralty censuring him). Then with an arch look added, "I shall tell my father." And the pinnacle that had brought a sub. went away with a potential Sea Lord. When the pinnacle was about a hundred yards off Dora waved her handkerchief. "Why is it that Dora does these things?" I saw the mute question in Sallie's eyes. The men would have cheered had they dared.

"Carruthers," I remarked as the pinnacle sped away from us, "will you put me ashore at once?"

"Why, old man?" he questioned blankly.

"Your most excellent sister," I retorted, "has been posing as the daughter of the First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, without even knowing if he be married or no. I call it disgraceful, and it is likely to produce a pained feeling in Whitehall when it becomes known. That sub. is bound to write to the Admiralty and demand the command of a Super-Dreadnought for his services. I demand to be put ashore at once."

When Carruthers had heard the story he laughed loud and long, and, putting his arm round Sallie, proclaimed hers the best brain in the family.

The log of the Medway guardship would persist in obtruding itself upon my vision. There would be an entry relating to the First Sea Lord's daughter and the service rendered her. The wretched business haunted me. I sought out "Who's Who"; but that gave me no assistance. If the First Sea Lord had a daughter, it might be all right; but if he had not? However, there was nothing to be done but to try to enjoy the trip, and forget the Admiralty.

The *Hilda* is a 200-ton barge-rigged, sailing yacht, possessed of an auxiliary motor; a boon to the wind or tide-bound yachtsman. Some men affect to despise the aid of a motor, but Carruthers argues that a mariner is not less a mariner because he harnesses to his needs an explosive-engine and a propeller.

Once aboard the *Hilda* I felt that our adventures were ended. It was perfect weather for idling. The previous day's rain had cleared the heavens of all but a few filmy clouds. There was a good sailing breeze, and the *Hilda* bent gravely over as she cut through the water on her way seawards. Malcolm was for'ard, lying on his back looking aloft at the swelling canvas. There is no sight so grand or pleasing to a yachtsman's eye as that obtained from this position, and Malcolm knows it. Carruthers

was at the helm flirting outrageously with Dora. Sallie was talking with old Jones, the bo'sun and mate, about his latest grandson.

The crew of the *Hilda* are to a man devoted to Sallie. Tidings that she is to be one of a cruising party means much and self-imposed extra labour, both as regards the *Hilda* herself and her crew. Everything and everybody are smartened up, and Vincent, the cook, ages perceptibly under the strain of thinking out a menu that shall tempt Sallie to eat. His brow never clears until Sallie has paid him the customary visit of ceremony, which to him is more in the nature of a religious rite.

"Chef"; (she always called him "chef") "it was delicious! Thank you very much indeed," Sallie would say with a grave and gracious smile befitting so great an occasion, a happy, boyish look would spread itself over Vincent's sombre features, and the crew would know that there was to be some dainty at their next meal; for Vincent, when happy, which was extremely seldom, radiated good-will and distributed his largess with unstinting hand.

There is no ecstasy like that of idleness, and no idleness to compare with that felt upon a yacht running before a breeze. Yesterday's troubles are wiped out, and to-morrow's anxieties seem too far off for serious consideration. I was standing musing upon the beauty of the day, watching the *Hilda's* track which seemed to trail off into infinity, when I became conscious that the little streak of grey smoke that I had been gazing at for some time came from the funnels of a destroyer, which was evidently being pushed. She was fetching us back to her at a rare pace, and was obviously heading our way. For some minutes I continued idly to watch her. Suddenly the old misgiving assailed me.

Sallie's deception had been discovered, and the irate captain of the guardship had sent to demand an explanation. I strolled over to Carruthers and told him my fears. He grinned with obvious enjoyment. Carruthers is imperturbable. He looked over his shoulder at the destroyer. After a time he called to Sallie, who was sitting amidships, musing.

"They're coming to fetch you, Sallie," he said cheerfully, and then explained his fears. "Shall we fight for you, my girl, or calmly give you up?"

Sallie clapped her hands with glee. To be chased by a warship was a novelty she enjoyed to its fullest extent.

"Will they fire, do you think?" she enquired of Malcolm, trembling with eagerness.

"They'll probably megaphone us to come up into the wind," responded the practical Malcolm.

Sallie's face fell. I really believe she half hoped that the destroyer would endeavour to sink the *Hilda*. By this time everyone aboard had become conscious that something unusual was happening. The crew stood grouped amidships, talking in undertones and casting side-glances at our little party standing round the wheel. It was now apparent to all that we were the destroyer's objective. On she came like a mad thing, her grey snout tearing at the waters and throwing them over her humped-up shoulders. She looked like some wicked gnome bent on the ruin of the inoffensive *Hilda*. Sallie's eyes danced with glee. She had never seen anything so magnificent as this sinister creature that came bounding towards us. We all watched breathlessly. Presently a crisp, metallic voice sounded through the megaphone:

"Yacht ahoy! we want to board you."

A few sharp words from Carruthers and we flew hither and thither, and soon the *Hilda* with mains'l and tops'l brailed came up into the wind. It was all quietly and prettily done, and our nimbleness much impressed the destroyer's crew, as we afterwards learned.

The destroyer was soon beside us. We expected another megaphone message; but no, they were lowering a boat. Dora became anxious and asked, could we not hide Sallie? Nothing short of extreme physical force could have hidden Sallie at that moment.

The destroyer's boat was soon under our lee, and an officer with the stripes of a lieutenant-commander sprang aboard and saluted Dora and Sallie. The *Hilda's* crew stood gazing at us in undisguised amazement. What was going to happen?

Sallie stepped forward.

The officer looked round as if seeking someone.

"Can I speak to Miss Crosstrees?" he enquired, looking from one to the other.

"I am Miss Crosstrees," said Sallie stepping forward.

A look of bewilderment spread itself over the young man's face. Then, as if with sudden inspiration, he plunged his hand into his waistcoat pocket and withdrew a small gold pencil case and held it out to Sallie.

"I think you dropped this in the pinnace. The captain of the guardship – er – er – sent me after you with it." The poor fellow seemed covered with confusion.

"Thank you," Sallie said, as she looked up at him with great, grave, but smiling eyes and with that damnable demureness that sends men mad about her, "but it isn't mine. I didn't drop anything in the launch. Thank you so much," she smiled. "It is so kind of Captain – . Will you thank him for taking so much trouble?" Then after a moment's pause she added, "No; I will write," and beckoning me to follow she descended to the cabin, where she wrote two blazing indiscretions, one to the Captain of the guardship and the other to the sublieutenant who had taken us off to the *Hilda*. I strove to prevent her: I remonstrated, I expostulated, I implored; but to no purpose. All I was there for, it appeared, was to tell her that a launch was not a pinnace, to post her as to other technicalities and to do the spelling. When we returned on deck the L. – C. was drinking champagne, whilst the crew of the destroyer's boat drank a mute toast in grog. In their pockets they had already stowed away a handful of Carruthers' cigars.

With much goodwill the boat put off, was hoisted aboard the destroyer, which swung round and, with a valedictory moan from her syren, darted off home again bearing important despatches from Sallie to the Captain of the Medway guardship and one of his junior officers.

"What did you say in that note?" I enquired of Sallie, visions of a prosecution for forgery flitting through my mind.

"Oh, I just thanked him," said Sallie nonchalantly; but I saw by the dancing lights in her eyes that there was something else.

"And – ?" I interrogated.

"Oh! I told him the truth and asked him to come to tea and bring that nice boy who had helped us."

"Sallie," I remarked severely, "captains of battleships do not generally take their junior officers out to tea."

But Sallie only smiled.

Later the cause of the young officer's confusion was explained in a letter he wrote to Sallie. He was engaged to Miss Crosstrees.

There was an unusual silence at the conclusion of the story, unbroken even by Bindle's mallet. Bindle insisted on a mallet upon being elected as chairman. It was obvious that Sallie had cast her spell over the Night Club.

"I'd a-liked to 'ave been one o' them officers. A real sport 'im wot didn't give 'er away," remarked Bindle at length meditatively. Then turning to me he enquired:

"Don't yer think, sir, we ought to sort o' revise them rules about ladies? We didn't ought to be narrow-minded."

"He's got Sallyitis," laughed Carruthers.

"Yes, I got it bad, sir," flashed Bindle, "an' I want a smile from 'er wot give it to me."

"What about your views on hens?" enquired Dare.

"Well, sir," replied Bindle with quiet self-possession, "a single little 'en won't do us any 'arm."

And that is how it came about that Sallie Carruthers was unanimously elected a member of the Night Club.

I doubt if anything ever gave Sallie greater pleasure than this tribute, particularly as she was always treated as one of ourselves, except by Angell Herald, who could never forget that he was something of a "ladies' man."

CHAPTER III

THE PRIME MINISTER DECIDES TO ADVERTISE

One of the characteristics of the Night Club is its mixed membership.

"Rummy crowd, ain't we?" Bindle had remarked to Sallie Carruthers the first night she was present. "There ain't a pair anywheres, except p'raps you an' me, miss."

And so it was, the only thing we have in common is our humanity. To see Angell Herald doing the "ladies' man" to Sallie is a sight that gives the rest of us a peculiar joy.

"'E do work 'ard, an' she bears it like a good un," was Bindle's comment.

Angell Herald's views on women are those of the *bon viveur* of the saloon bar. When he addresses Sallie his whole manner changes, just as most people's idiom undergoes revision when they write a letter. You can see the dear fellow pulling himself together and, metaphorically, shooting out his cuffs and straightening his tie as a preliminary to opening fire. His manners are superb, elaborate, suburban. If Sallie happen to wander near the door, Angell Herald dashes forward and opens it, attracting general attention and arresting everybody's conversation.

"He's got more manners than breeding," Dare once whispered to me after a particularly elaborate demonstration of Herald's politeness. If Sallie rises, Herald comes to his feet with a suddenness that has been known to upset his chair.

He has no humour, but many jokes – most of which are for men only. It took him some time to gauge his company, when Dick Little introduced him to our circle, and it came about thus.

One evening he had told a particularly pointless "man's story," and his was the only laugh that announced its conclusion. Dick Little strove to smooth over the hiatus; but Bindle, whose disgust was obvious, had thrown a bomb upon troubled waters by enquiring of Dick Little with great innocence, "Let me see, sir, I think you said you was out o' carbolic!" From that date Angell Herald's stories were merely pointless without being obscene. Sallie's presence was a good influence.

In spite of his limitations, Angell Herald is not a bad fellow, and he told us many amusing stories of the "publicity" world. He knows Fleet Street thoroughly from the "box-office" point of view, and he seems to regard the editorial aspect of the newspaper world with amused tolerance. "Where would those scribblers be," he would enquire with fine scorn, "without adverts.? Yet would you believe it," he had once said to Dare, "they look down upon us?"

"Most extraordinary," Dare had responded.

"Still it's a fact," Angell Herald had assured him, with the air of a man who knows from a friend at the Admiralty that fifty German submarines were sunk during the previous week.

Angell Herald was always the publicity agent, even when telling his stories. Dare had once said with great truth, "There is more herald than angel about the dear chap."

Dare was particularly interested in the following story: —

The morning had begun badly. The coffee was cold and the bacon burnt. Angell Herald spoke to Mrs. Wiggins about it, and she had promptly given notice. In Mrs. Wiggins it was nothing new for her to give notice. She generally did so twice a week; but this was the third time during the current week, and it was only Tuesday. Angell Herald had been forced to apologise. He hated apologising – except to a client. Then there was an east wind blowing. He disliked east winds intensely, they affected his liver.

On the way to the office he called in and had his hat ironed. He also bought a rose. He always buys a rose when there is an east wind, and he likewise always has his hat ironed; it mitigates the pinched expression of his features.

As he entered his office, he was conscious of not replying to Pearl's "Good morning." Pearl is Angell Herald's clerk, the only member of his staff. With somewhat ambiguous humour Angell

Herald calls him "the pearl of great price," as every fortnight with painful regularity he asks for a rise – he never gets it. When Pearl is not asking for a rise, he is soliciting a half-holiday in which either to marry a friend, or bury a relative. Pearl is entirely lacking in originality. That is what makes him a most admirable clerk for an advertising man.

On this particular morning, Angell Herald each had a funeral on the same day. They closed the office and met at Epsom! Neither referred to the matter subsequently.

On this particular morning Angell Herald saw that Pearl was in a state of suppressed excitement. Something had happened. Was it another friend desirous of getting married, or a double death? Pearl himself, however, settled the matter by saying:

"There's a letter from No. 110 Downing Street, sir."

Then, of course, his employer knew that it was merely insanity.

"Don't be an ass, Pearl," was the retort. Angell Herald allows Pearl a considerable amount of licence, because he is valuable to him. Furthermore, he permits his subordinate to joke sometimes, in lieu of increasing his salary.

Pearl's reply was to produce a letter, franked with the stamp of the Prime Minister. Angell Herald tore it open, hurriedly, and read: —

To Angell Herald, Esq.,

382 Fleet Street, E.G.

DEAR SIR,

Your name has been given to me as an expert in the matter of publicity. I shall be glad if you will call here at 10.30 to-morrow with regard to a matter of considerable importance.

I am,

Yours faithfully,

LLEWELLYN JOHN.

Angell Herald was overwhelmed. Mr. Llewellyn John, who had held office for years with the Waightensea Ministry, and had just formed a Government of his own, was sending for him, Angell Herald, Publicity Agent, and furthermore had signed the letter himself. It was bewildering. What could it mean?

Angell Herald, turning to Pearl and, pulling himself together, announced casually:

"I shall probably be some time, Pearl. I have an engagement with" – and he mouthed the words – "Mr. Llewellyn John, at Downing Street, at 10.30, which will probably occupy me some time."

The burnt bacon, the cold coffee, Mrs. Wiggins' notice; all were forgotten in the dropping of Pearl's jaw. It was a delight to his chief to see the clerk's surprise.

At 10.25 sharp, Angell Herald was enquiring for Mr. Llewellyn John at 110 Downing Street. It was clear that he was expected. He was led along a corridor, through a wide hall, and eventually into a large room. From the further corner a little man, with generous grey hair or a more than conventional length and a smile of bewildering sunniness, rose and came towards him.

"Mr. Angell Herald?" he enquired.

Angell Herald bowed. He had momentarily lost the power of speech. The Prime Minister held out his hand, Angell Herald grasped it. He was prepared to grasp anything to make up for his silence.

"Pray, sit down," said the Prime Minister. "I want to have a confidential chat with you."

Angell Herald sat down. He twirled his hat in his hands. He was conscious of the perfume of his rose, and that he was behaving like an ass. He looked round the room. He felt he could do anything in the world save look at this great little man, who sat smiling opposite to him. It was Mr. Llewellyn John who broke the silence.

"Now, Mr. Herald. I hear you are an expert of publicity methods."

Angell Herald bowed.

"You may be wondering why I sent for you?"

Angell Herald muttered something to the effect that he was.

"Well," said the Prime Minister deliberately, "it is because I have decided to advertise."

"To what, sir?" blurted out the astonished publicity agent.

"To advertise. Why should not a Government be advertised just as a pill, a concert-singer, or a rubber-tyre? Everybody advertises, and we must advertise. Those who don't will go to the wall – or in Opposition, which is the same thing."

Angell Herald introduced a tactful little laugh. It was a success.

"Certainly," he replied, beginning to feel more at ease. "Quite naturally, I agree with you. Now, an inspired article, for instance, in *The Age*, an illustrated interview in *The Briton*, with pictures of yourself playing with dogs, children and things, a – "

"My dear sir, those are obsolete methods. We are living in a new age, an age that requires novelty. If you advertise in the right way, you will get your public; but you have to hit it very hard to make it look. My friend Mr. Chappledale, for instance, he advertises; but there is no originality in his methods. Sir Lomas Tipton, he advertises; but how? I might endeavour to get together a football team to 'lift' the English Cup; but what good would that do?"

"Quite so," was the dazed response, "quite so."

"Take the late Lord Range, for instance," continued Mr. Llewellyn John. "He understood modern methods. Instead of stating, as some antiquated Minister might, that the King and country needed 300,000 high-explosive shells, he said: 'Lord Range calls for 300,000 high-explosive shells.' He was up to date, and he got them. A magnificent fellow Range. Didn't care a – ahem! for anybody. Was even rude to me," he muttered reminiscently. "I liked him for it."

"Now take the Cyrils, that famous Parliamentary family dating back for centuries. They do not know how to advertise. Ten years hence there won't be a Cyril in the House of Commons. There may be a few in the House of Lords – that depends on democracy."

"Then there's my old friend Waightensea. He did not advertise as the needs of the political situation demanded he should, and the result is that he has had to go. It does not matter who you are in these days – bishop or blacksmith, Prime Minister or pierrot – you've got to advertise – the war has brought us this!"

Hitherto Angell Herald had regarded himself as second to none in the advertising world; but Mr. Llewellyn John made him feel a child at the game.

"The most far-seeing man in Europe has been the Kaiser. He was the first who understood the true value of advertisement, and he ran it for all he was worth. We laughed at him, but we listened. Some people think he overdid it a little," this with a smile; "but still among monarchs he certainly was the first to appreciate that you have got to run a monarchy rather as you have a patent medicine, spend ninety per cent. of your money on advertising, and the other ten per cent. on the article itself – less if possible."

Again the Prime Minister flashed upon his visitor that bewildering smile. Angell Herald hinted that this would be a very big business, involving many thousands of pounds.

"Quite so," remarked Mr. Llewellyn John. "Now, the point is, what can this additional expenditure be charged up against? It can't be travelling expenses, because even a Prime Minister could not spend five figures a year on travelling. Secret Service would be difficult. Personally I rather lean to the Naval Estimates."

"The Naval Estimates!" cried Angell Herald.

"Exactly," was the reply. "We are always a little inclined to be penurious over the Army; but if there is one thing that an Englishman is generous about – always excepting the question of meals – it is the Naval Estimates. Yes," he continued, as if to himself, "I think we might charge it up against the Naval Estimates."

"It is of no use making speeches, no one reads them. We don't care for politics. We are a nation of grumblers in search of scapegoats. As you know, I broke into epigrammatic utterances. Look at

their success. You will remember what a sensation I created with that clarion call of mine, 'Now we sha'n't be long!' the cables and Marconi installations thrilled and stuttered it throughout the habitable globe. I followed it with 'Arf a mo', which was even more popular. My greatest cry, however, was 'Pip-pip!' which has been translated into two hundred and eighty-seven languages and dialects."

Angell Herald smiled sympathetically. He had never felt so much like a schoolboy undergoing instruction than as he listened to this remarkable man, who was teaching him his own business.

"And now, for the future," continued Mr. Llewellyn John, "we are going to strike out a new line. I intend to advertise my Ministry, advertise it as no ministry has ever been advertised before. I will make the Kaiser look parochial and Mr. Moosephalt provincial. Now let us get down to brass tacks. America is wonderfully apt in her expressions. I only discovered this after she joined the Allies. Have you a notebook with you, Mr. Herald?"

"Yes, sir," replied Angell Herald, hastily drawing one from his pocket, relieved at having something to do.

"Now listen," the Prime Minister continued. "I propose to have pages in the principal newspapers devoted to separate subjects. One will be, for instance, 'The Home Life of England.' There will be pictures of myself and family enjoying the home life, entertaining my friends at home, golfing, playing hop-sotch with my children – "

"But," interrupted Angell Herald, "isn't the Home Life stunt a little played out?"

"Exactly, my dear Mr. Herald, exactly. That is just what I was coming to. There will also be pictures showing me entertaining guests at the Ritz-Carlton, at the Opera, at the pantomime, at the theatre, at the races, at Westminster Abbey, at boxing matches."

"But," interrupted Angell Herald, "how is this to be called 'The Home Life?'"

"My dear sir, the Larger Home Life, the Larger Home Life. Get that well into your mind. I am appealing to the great public, not the relics of the early Victorian Era, the Little Home-Lifers, sitting one on either side of silly artistic fireplaces, gazing into each other's stupid eyes, and looking and feeling unutterably bored. Let us have the Large Home-Lifers. Occasionally, when the weather is warm, I shall put in an appearance at the public swimming-baths; my figure will stand it."

"Excellent!" Angell Herald murmured. "Wonderful!" He was thrilled by this man's genius.

"Then another would be 'The Fleet' – Great Britain's Love for Her Navy.' It's a fine call, it's a thrilling call. I shall have myself photographed entering the train, lunching in the train, getting out of the train, being received by the local authorities. Then I shall see myself pictured with Sir Goliath Maggie on board *The Aluminium Earl*. I shall make a speech about the Nelson touch, dragging in the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*, and touching lightly upon the story of the *Revenge*. No, on second thoughts I cannot do that. America has come in, and Spain may at any moment. No," he added musingly, "that will not do. They say I lack statesmanship, and that would give them an admirable peg. No, we'll let that go."

"Then again I shall deal with the Woman Question, from a new point of view. I shall speak more or less sympathetically upon the subject of revolutionary propaganda and sedition. Here I shall bring in another famous epigram I have prepared. 'The Hand that rocks the Empire rules the World.' I shall be photographed receiving flowers, having my hat knocked off by an irate woman, possibly being embraced by another woman in a moment of political ecstasy. That will appeal to the public tremendously."

"Excellent!" murmured the bewildered publicity agent, conscious of the inadequacy of the word.

"But there is one important thing. To each of these huge scale advertisements there must be a moral. There must be something that will appeal to the imagination of the Briton, and, as you and I know, nothing so appeals to him as that which touches his pocket. It is Democracy that will rule the world in future. Now in the case of the Home Life of England, for instance, I shall comment upon the unnecessary extravagance that I have observed in certain quarters, notably the gorgeous uniforms

of the officials at the Ritz-Carlton. I shall pass a Bill quickly through the House taxing silk stockings for men and the wearing of calves. That will please the public.

"Then with regard to the Navy, I shall call attention to the enormous amount of brass-work. I shall incidentally refer to the fact that something like a quarter of a million per annum is spent on brass-polish for the Navy. I shall give the necessary orders through the First Lord that all brass-work shall in future be japanned, and so on."

"Mr. Llewellyn John," Angell Herald burst out, "what a loss you are to the advertising world!"

The Prime Minister smiled, and continued:

"Then there comes the personal question. There must be little paragraphs about myself constantly in the papers. For instance, as I am leaving this place I slip in getting into my car, and have to be led back into the house. There will be photographs of the policeman who rushes up, the look of solicitude on his face. There will also be photographs of the policeman's wife and the policeman's daughter – possibly a son or nephew serving at the front. My family will be photographed at the windows, looking out anxiously to see what has happened. There can also be a few personal particulars about my chauffeur.

"Later I shall be photographed limping out of the house and being helped into the car by three secretaries, four policemen and my chauffeur. In the press there will be comments upon my stoicism. How, in spite of being in obvious pain, I put the affairs of the Empire before those of my own person. Later, possibly there may be an attempt to abduct my daughter. Another time there can be an attempt on my life."

"On your life, sir?"

"Oh, yes, yes," he continued airily. "These things can always be arranged. You see, I can be walking in some lonely place, and you can come up and – well, knock me down."

"Me!" gasped Angell Herald in ungrammatical horror.

"Exactly," he replied, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world for a publicity-agent to knock down a Prime Minister. "A great sensation would be created, and it would extend to the ends of the earth. We could suggest that the Kaiser was deeply involved in the plot.

"Again, I can slip on a banana skin, and run a shirt Bill through the House providing that everyone who eats bananas must carry about the skins until he gets home, where they must be put in the dust-bin. This would gain for me the vote of every human being who has ever slipped on a banana skin.

"Finally we come to the epigrammatic phrases. There is one I have in mind that should create a sensation. It is: 'One of these days you'll see what you won't wait for.' I got it from one of the furniture men who assisted when I moved into No. 110; a droll fellow, an exceedingly droll fellow. His name was – let me see, yes, Joseph Bindle. I thought of asking him to join my Ministry, but I remembered the prejudice that one has to fight in this country in all matters affecting innovation. Another phrase that may be useful to us is: 'All is not cult that kulturs.'

"Oh! by the way, couldn't we run 'The Twenty-three Gentlemen who are always too late' on the lines of 'Ten Little Nigger Boys?' I think there's something in that.

"But we must first have some refreshment. Ah! here it is."

A maid entered with a tray on which were two glasses of milk and three small oatmeal biscuits. Angell Herald took the milk, but refused the biscuits. Mr. Llewellyn John took the other glass and a biscuit, which he put on the table beside him. When the maid had retired he explained with a laugh:

"My official lunch, the photographer and cinema operator will be here in a minute. We expect great things from both the photograph and the film. 'An Ascetic Premier' we are calling it. Now drink your milk."

Angell Herald gulped down a mouthful of the unaccustomed fluid, and put down the glass well out of reach.

"Yes," continued Mr. Llewellyn John, "there is a vast field before us. Now, Mr. Herald, will you or will you not throw yourself wholeheartedly into this project? It is a chance of a lifetime. Will you become the first Head of my Publicity Bureau? You can name your own terms. I want you to do the thing thoroughly, and no expense will be spared."

For some reason or other Angell Herald found himself dumb. He could do nothing but gaze at Mr. Llewellyn John in bewilderment. He strove to speak. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. Mr. Llewellyn John looked at him in surprise.

"Do you hear me, sir? Do you hear me, sir?" he vociferated, banging his hand on the table. "Do you hear me, sir?"

Then something seemed to happen. The scene faded, and Angell Herald found that it was not Mr. Llewellyn John's voice, but that of Mrs. Wiggins; and he was in bed, and somebody was knocking outside his door, obviously Mrs. Wiggins.

"Do you hear me, sir?" she repeated. "It is eight o'clock, and I've knocked three times."

"An' you dreamt all that, sir?" enquired Bindle of Angell Herald.

"Every word of it," Herald replied as if scorning to lay claim to imagination.

"Wonderful!" was all Bindle said, and the eye that looked over the brim of his pewter caught mine and the lid slowly drooped and then raised itself again. There is a world of expression in Bindle's eyes – when taken singly.

The story had really been a "rag" planned by Dick Little and Dare, whom Angell Herald had told that he dreamed he had been asked by Mr. Llewellyn John to become Minister of Publicity, and we had looked forward with some interest to see how he would take the yarn. He had accepted it, without comment.

"That chap would accept anything that he thought increased his own importance," said Carruthers after Angell Herald's departure.

"Fancy them a-knowin' all about me at Downin' Street," remarked Bindle as he rose to go.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOY

The "Assassins," as Carruthers called Tims' men, were all-powerful at the Night Club. They were always in sufficient strength to form a majority; but in reality Bindle exercised a sort of unconscious despotism. When a question arose, we instinctively looked to Bindle, who in turn looked to Sallie.

"When I first 'eard that frogs come out o' tadpoles, I couldn't 'ardly believe it," Bindle once remarked, "but when I looks at the Assassins an' remembers that they'll become doctors in top 'ats, with a you-leave-it-to-me-an'-I'll-save-yer-if-I-can look, well, after that I'll believe anythink."

"What's the matter with us?" enquired Roger Blint, a little dark man with a quiet manner and a violent soul.

"Well, as far as I can see, there ain't nothink wrong wi yer as men; but doctors – !" Bindle shook his head despondently. "I wouldn't trust my young life to one of yer."

Bindle fixed his gaze on Jim Colman, the recognised leader of all demonstrations, physical and vocal. Colman has the instincts of a mob-leader, but the most delicate "touch" among the younger men at Tims. He is destined for Harley Street and a baronetcy.

"Look at Mr. Colman," continued Bindle. "'Ow'd jer like to 'ave 'im 'oldin' yer 'and an' tellin' yer to get ready for an 'arp?"

"Well, what about Bill?" enquired Colman. "He looks harmless enough – what?"

Bill Simmonds is a little sandy fellow, with a bald, conical head, who beams upon the world through gold-rimmed spectacles, which give him a genial, benevolent expression. He looks for all the world like "a clever egg," as Dare once described him.

"Well," remarked Bindle, judicially, examining Bill Simmonds' face, "I might be prepared to trust 'im wi' my soul; but as for my body, well, give me Mr. Dennett or Mr. Smith. I'm like Mrs. B.; I like 'em big."

Hugh Dennett is an international three-quarter who has made football history, whereas Archie Smith was the amateur champion heavy-weight when the war broke out.

"I ain't got anythink to say against you as sports," said Bindle encouragingly; "but as doctors, well, well!" And again he shook his head with mournful conviction.

Tims' men never talk "shop," but from scraps of conversation among themselves that I have overheard, theirs is a strenuous life. Sometimes they do not see their beds for three consecutive nights; yet they are always cheery and regard whatever they have to do as their "bit." One complaint they have, that they are not allowed to go to the front.

All seem to find in the Night Club relaxation from strenuous days and sleepless nights. According to Bindle, who is a recognised authority upon such matters, they are a cheer-o! crowd. It was they who had been loudest in their support of Sallie's election, and when "the Boy's" story came to be told, they were equally definite in their view that he must be invited to join our exclusive circle. These were the only two instances of stories told at the Night Club resulting in our membership being increased. Incidentally the Boy fell in love with Sallie, and this formed an additional bond of sympathy between him and us.

I

To his brother officers he was always "The Boy." The men, with more directness of speech, referred to him as "The Kid," whilst at Whitehall he was known as Second Lieut. Richard St. John Custance Summers, of the 8th Service Battalion Westshire Regiment.

How he managed to secure his commission no one ever knew.

"Must 'a been 'is bloomin' smile," was the opinion of the platoon sergeant, expressed to the company-sergeant-major. "The men make fools o' themselves about the Kid."

Chubby-faced, languid of manner, forgetful and "frightfully sorry" afterwards, even in his khaki he did not look more than sixteen. At mess he sat as if he had collapsed from sheer lack of bone necessary to keep him rigid. He literally lolled through life.

In carrying out his duties, such as he was unsuccessful in evading, he gave the impression of being willing in spirit, but finding great difficulty in getting his body to respond to his wishes.

One day the Colonel, a big blue-eyed man, whom the men called "the Kid's nurse," had told him that he had "the spirit of a martinet, but the body of a defaulter," which was not a bad description for the C.O., who did not incline to epigram.

When given an order, the Boy would salute, with that irresistible smile of his that got him out of some scrapes and into others, then off he would lounge, all legs and arms, like a young colt, although as a matter of fact he was below medium height. When he made a mistake the N.C.O.'s and men contrived to correct it, with the result that his was the smartest platoon in the battalion. The Senior Major had once said to him:

"Boy, you're the slackest young cub I've ever met, yet you get more out of the men than the Colonel and I combined. How is it?"

"I suppose, sir," replied the Boy with great seriousness, "they see I'm such an awful ass that they're sorry for me."

The Boy got more leave and took more leave than any other officer in the division, and no one seemed to resent it. He never did anything in quite the same way as another youngster would, and he was a constant source of interest to his brother officers.

One roystering night he had returned to his quarters in a state ill-befitting "an officer and a gentleman," and the company-sergeant-major, aided by a corporal, had put him to bed and they had mutually sworn eternal secrecy. In the morning, although the two non-coms. had managed to convey to him that only they knew of the episode, the Boy had gone to the Colonel, and before the other officers said:

"I returned to barracks last night drunk, sir. I was very drunk and I think I was singing. I'm sorry. It sha'n't occur again."

The Colonel asked who had seen him, and on being told that only the company-sergeant-major and a corporal knew of the incident, he burst out with:

"Then why the devil do you tell me about it?"

"I wanted you to know, sir. It was rather rotten of me. I know you hate it, sir, and it's a bad example."

The C.O. turned aside to hide a smile. The idea of the Boy being an example to anyone or anything amused him; but being a disciplinarian, and understanding something of the Boy's nature, he stopped a week-end leave due some ten days hence, and from the Boy's smile as he saluted he saw that he had done the right thing.

One day the Boy was given charge of his company in a sham fight, at which as everybody knew the Brigadier was to be present.

With his command, the Boy was like a kitten with a skein of wool. He got it hopelessly tangled. Perspiring and swearing N.C.O.'s strove in vain to evolve order and find out exactly where they were.

Suddenly, with a yell to fix bayonets and charge, the Boy darted forward followed by the men in a manner that would have broken the heart of a drill-sergeant. They had blundered upon an enemy field battery in the act of limbering up, and the Boy returned to camp with six guns and a stream of prisoners, and the Brigadier had spoken to the Colonel of the exploit.

"Talk about luck! Blimey! That Kid'll save the bloomin' regiment one o' these days," grinned a private, as the boy marched with rather a bored air at the head of his day's bag.

The Boy continued to avoid as if by instinct all the duties he possibly could. Indeed, he was apparently aided and abetted by officers and men alike. When at last the word arrived to prepare to entrain for an unknown destination, the Boy's chief concern had been about his kit. The C.O.'s instructions had been definite and incisively expressed. He ordered that nothing be taken that was not absolutely necessary, and had added that he did not want to see France lumbered up with cast-off articles of kit of the 8th Westshires.

There had been rather a heated argument between the Boy and his captain as to the interpretation of the word "necessaries."

"My boot-trees and manicure set," said the Boy, "are as necessary to me as your trousers are to you."

"Rot!" the captain had replied. "You'll be thinking more of your skin than of your nails when you get out there."

The Boy had compromised by leaving the boot-trees and taking a pocket manicure set.

In the trenches he was the same imperturbable, languid half boy, half man he had been in England. He was as indifferent to shells and bullets as to the grins of the men as he lolled against the parados polishing his nails. Sometimes he would bewail the lost boot-trees as he surveyed his hopeless-looking foot-gear.

At first the uncleanness of trench life had roused him from his accustomed languor, but later he accepted this and what it entailed, not with philosophic calm, but because protest involved effort.

Even when towards the end of the September that culminated in Loos it became known that the 8th Westshires were to take part in "the big push," and whilst officers and men were eagerly discussing their chances, he remained his sunny, imperturbable self.

On the night before the charge, the Colonel had sent for him to go to his dug-out, and there had told him that early in the morning he was to go back with an important message to Divisional headquarters and await a reply, which he was to bring back after the action. Without a word the Boy gave the necessary acknowledgment and saluted, but there was a mutinous look in his eyes as he wheeled round and left the Colonel's dug-out.

He spoke to no one, although many of his brother officers watched him to see how he would take it. The C.O. had conferred with the Senior Major, and decided that he could not risk the Boy's life, a view that was entirely endorsed by every officer and man in the regiment.

For hours the Boy stood brooding and polishing his nails. Then, just before "stand-to" he disappeared. His captain was the first to discover the fact, and enquiry was made along the whole line of trenches, but no one had seen the Boy for at least half an hour.

II

The guns had opened their brazen throats in a frenzy of hate. Overhead shells whistled and hissed, lumbered and howled as they tore towards the enemy trenches, a hurricane of screaming hate. Gusts of shrapnel spat death from above, and rifle and machine-gun bullets buried themselves impotently in the sandbags amid little puffs of dust. Slowly dawn shivered into day – a day of greyness and of death.

In the assembly-trench the 8th Westshires were waiting. Heavy-eyed and silent they gazed towards the enemy lines, hidden by a curtain of dense yellow smoke. Against the parapet scaling ladders were placed ready. At a word, a short snapping sound barked along the trench, the ladders suddenly became alive, as men scrambled up and passed over the top, or fell backward with a dull thud.

"No rushing, a steady advance in open order," had been the Colonel's last words to his officers.

The 8th Westshires formed up and, as steady as on parade, advanced. They had not proceeded more than thirty yards when with a sigh a breeze swept past them and carried the yellow gas beyond the first enemy trench, like a curtain of fairy gauze.

Machine-guns and rifles poured a merciless fire into the Westshires. Everywhere men were dropping, silently or with little coughs of surprise. They advanced a further twenty yards and then faltered. With a shout the Colonel dashed on waving his stock. The moment of uncertainty seemed to pass, when suddenly the Colonel dropped.

"My God!" muttered the Senior Major, as he saw the indecision pass like a wave along the line; he also noticed several men had turned and were stealing back to the trenches they had just left. "They'll – they'll – " and there was a sob in his voice.

Just at the moment when retreat seemed inevitable, a figure rose from a small shell-crater, and with a yell that no one heard waved on the Westshires.

"It's the Boy," gasped an officer. "Where the hell – "

"It's the bloomin' Kid. Well I'm damned!" roared the colour sergeant. "'Ere, come on, or they'll nab 'im."

This was enough for the Westshires. Capture the Kid? Not if they knew it. With a howl they raced for the enemy trench, overtaking the Boy two yards from the sand-bags. The men's blood was up. They tumbled into the first trench, and with a sickening "sog sog" their bayonets got to work. Little coughs and grunts told of men doubled up. Everywhere cries of "Kamerad" were heard.

"It's no use yellin', sonny," one man was heard to say. "You've got to 'ave it – you've got to 'ave it!" and he drove his bayonet into a German's massive loins.

The Boy had come through untouched. Like a moth he flitted about from place to place, and wherever he was, there the fighting would be at its fiercest. Not only had the second line of trenches been taken in accordance with instructions, but the Westshires had crushed all resistance in the first, which they should have left to a following battalion. The work done, the Boy called two stretcher-bearers, and went back in search of the Colonel.

III

That night the Colonel sat in a German dugout, with a heavily bandaged leg. He had refused to go to the rear. He must first see the Boy.

When he entered, the Boy saluted and stood as if waiting for something that he knew would happen, but in which he was not particularly interested.

"What have you to say?" the Colonel enquired with unsmiling eyes. In the 8th Westshires officers and men alike dreaded the absence of that smile which seemed so much a part of the Colonel's eyes.

The Boy hung his head. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, in a low, husky voice.

"You remember my orders?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet you absented yourself without leave."

"It was – " the Boy stopped; his voice seemed suddenly to forsake him. Then after a moment's pause the words came in a rush.

"It was the old dad, sir. I've never let him know I'm such a rotter. If he knew I was sent to rear before the charge it would have crocked him. He – he – thinks no end of me."

The Boy stopped again and looked at the Colonel. "I crept out this morning, and lay in a small crater near our trench until the advance. I was going to join up and I thought I should get killed. He would sooner have me dead than not there. I'm sorry, sir – I'm – " The Boy's voice trailed off into a sob.

"You know what you did to-day?" enquired the Colonel. The smile was back in his eyes, but the Boy did not see it.

"Deserted!" The word came out with a jerk.

"Yes, you deserted – that is, technically – but you saved the whole battalion from being cut up and – possibly disgraced."

The Boy looked at the C.O. in wonder. He blinked his eyes uncertainly.

"I – I don't – "

"Listen, Boy! You were sent out by my orders on listening-patrol, and told to join up with the Battalion when it advanced. You did so, do you understand?"

"But listening-patrols aren't sent out under bombardment, sir."

"Damn you, Boy, what the devil do you mean? Am I C.O. or you?" The Colonel wanted to laugh and simulated anger to preserve his authority.

"I'm sorry, sir; but – "

"Well, never mind about listening-patrol. I shall send an account of your services to the General that will get you the D.S.O., possibly the V.C. I will write to the – er – old dad myself." The Colonel's voice was husky.

"Now, get out, Boy, damn it – get out at once!"

And the Boy got out.

There was the vigour of conviction in Bindle's play with his mallet, and the hum of talk at the conclusion of the story made it obvious that the Boy had considerably enlarged the circle of his friends.

"He's a dear!" Sallie blinked her eyes vigorously. They were suspiciously moist.

"Ere, 'ere, miss," agreed Bindle. As a matter of fact Bindle always agrees with anything that Sallie says.

"I say, Windover, couldn't you bring him round one night?" enquired Dick Little.

"I'll try," said Windover. "He's stationed at Wimbledon now."

"And did he get the V.C.?" enquired the practical-minded Angell Herald.

"No, the D.S.O.," replied Windover, "with promotion to a first lieutenancy."

"What a shame," said Sallie, and turning to Windover she said, "You will bring him, Winnie, won't you?" Sallie and Windover are old friends.

And that is how the Boy became a "Night-Clubber." He is a strange combination of impudence and innocence; but there is one way of bringing him to heel. It was quite by accident that I discovered it.

One evening he had been roasting poor Angell Herald rather badly, and although that astute person was sublimely unaware of what was taking place, both Dick Little and I thought things had gone far enough.

I happened to have with me the manuscript of the story of how the Boy got his D.S.O. Without a word I started reading from it in a loud voice. I had not got six lines down the page before he slowly dragged himself out of the armchair in which he was lounging, his face crimson, and, walking towards the door, remarked:

"You'll find me on the mat when you've done reading rot."

That is the Boy all over.

CHAPTER V

THE BARABBAS CLUB

I have some acquaintance with authors; but of all I have encountered Jocelyn Dare is in many ways the most remarkable. Careless, generous, passionate, he is never so happy as when narrating the enormities of publishers. His white, delicate fingers will move nervously, his long black locks fall over his alabaster forehead, and his black eyes flash as he describes the doings of these "parasites" and "pariahs," as he calls them.

He is a thoroughly good fellow in spite of this eccentricity, never withholding a helping hand from anyone. I believe he would succour even a publisher if he found one in need of help; but he can no more resist denouncing the fraternity than he can keep the flood of raven hair from falling over his eyes when he becomes excited.

Bindle likes him, and that is a testimonial. They have something in common, as Dare's heart, like Bindle's "various" veins, is a bar to his doing his bit, and Dare feels it as much as does Bindle.

"I like to listen to Mr. Gawd Blast 'ammerin' tacks into publishers," Bindle would remark appreciatively. "An' don't 'e know some words too!"

Dare's vocabulary is almost unique. He is a master of the English tongue. At rhetorical invective I have never heard his equal, and I have encountered a Thames lighterman in one of his inspired moments. Bindle would sit in mute admiration, watching Dare as he flung the mantle of obloquy over "that cancer polluting the face of God's fair earth."¹

It was Dare who told us the story of the author who, unable to extract his royalties from a publisher, seized him by the beard and swore he would hang on until the money was forthcoming. "And that," he concluded, "is why not one publisher in a hundred wears a beard."

It was Dare, too, who told us of the author who went to a certain well-known publisher with a manuscript, saying, "My previous books have been published by – (and he mentioned the names of three honoured firms) – and they were rogues to a man, did me right and left, only I could never catch them, not even with the help of the Society of Authors. So I've brought my new book to you, Mr. Blank."

The publisher was delighted at the compliment and, smiling in his most winning manner, enquired, "And may I ask why you come to me, sir?"

He waited expectantly, his lips still bearing the after-glow of the smile.

"I come to you, Mr. Blank," the author replied impressively, "because you are an honest man."

And the publisher fainted.

Dare would laugh with the joyousness of a schoolboy when telling these yarns. But there is no malice in him. He is as mischievous as a puppy; but as soft-hearted as a woman.

There is something strangely lovable about Dare. Certain of his mannerisms are in themselves feminine; yet he is never effeminate. One of these mannerisms is what might be called the fugitive touch, which is with a woman a caress. He will lay his hand upon your coatsleeve just for a second, or put it across your shoulders, a slight brushing movement, which betokens comradeship.

He adores children. I have seen him, when exquisitely turned out in top hat and morning coat, pick up a howling youngster that had come a cropper, brush it down, stay its cries and stop its tears, and send it home wreathed in rainbow smiles, clutching a generous-sized bag of sweets. Such is Jocelyn Dare.

When the time came for a story, he told that of the Barabbas Club. For some time I hesitated to write it up for the Night Club. I regarded it as too limited in its appeal. At last, however, I decided

¹ To those who are not authors it should be explained that Dare refers to publishers as a whole.

to let the Club judge for itself. Dare took great interest in the writing of the story, and himself read and corrected the typescript.

I

"My dear fellow," said Jocelyn Dare, "the Seven-headed Beast of the Apocalypse is nothing to it. It's absolutely unique."

With the air of a man who has completed a life's work, Dare tapped some sheets of manuscript that lay upon the table, selected a cigarette from the box with a care and deliberation usually bestowed upon cigars, and proceeded: "You are a doctor, whose mission in life is to purge and purify the human body; I am a novelist whose purpose it is to perform the same office for the human soul."

From the depths of a particularly comfortable easy-chair, Dick Little looked up good-humouredly at his friend.

"You're a queer devil, Dare. One of these days you'll get a shock – poseurs always do."

Dare laughed easily, and Dick Little continued. "But what have publishers to do with the human soul? That's what puzzles me."

"There is only one thing, my poor Little," replied Dare, looking down at the other with a smile of pity, "that makes friendship between you and me at all possible."

"And that is?"

"Your incomparable understanding of my corpus, which you persist in calling my liver. I give you all credit for this. You know my constitution to a nicety, and in a way you are responsible for my novels."

"Good God!" ejaculated Dick Little, sitting up in his chair with an expression of alarm upon his features. "I hope not."

"Listen!" said Dare. "A publisher is an obstacle to intellectual progress. He is a parasite, battenning upon the flower of genius. That is why we founded the Barabbas Club. It frankly encourages authors to quarrel with their publishers. No one is eligible for membership who cannot prove conclusively to the Committee that he has been extremely rude to at least one publisher. I myself have been grossly insulting to seventeen different publishers, on several occasions before their own clerks. I have taken three into Court – I confess I lost each case – and I horsewhipped him who published *The Greater Purity* because he failed to advertise it sufficiently."

"And what happened?" queried Dick Little, who had heard the story a score of times.

"I was summonsed for assault. The magistrate was a creature entirely devoid of literary perception. He fined me five guineas, plus five guineas damages, and two guineas costs. But wait! Now here comes the shameful part of the story. Later I discovered that I had been wrong about the advertising. I wrote to that worm, that foul weed who is poisoning the slopes of Parnassus, apologising for whipping him, and will you believe it, he absolutely refused to return the five guineas damages?"

Dick Little laughed. He always laughed to see Dare upon his hobby-horse.

"The result of that case was an addition to the rules of the Barabbas Club, by which it was provided that, whenever an author horsewhipped a publisher, with or without justification, the president of the club should resign, and his place be automatically filled by the horsewhipper."

Dick Little rose from his chair, stretched himself lazily, lighted another cigarette and prepared to take his departure.

"One moment, my dear fellow," remarked Dare, "I must tell you something about this, *The Damning of a Soul*." He tapped the manuscript upon the table. "It gives a picture of a publisher, so vivid, so horrible, so convincing, that I shudder when I think that anything so vile can be permitted to exist by our most gracious sovereign lady, Nature. It tells of the gradual intellectual murder of a great genius through lack of proper advertising by his publisher. It is a masterly picture of the effect

of advertising matter upon imaginative mind.' I quote the words of our President. It will create a sensation."

"But what about libel?" enquired Dick Little, whose more cautious nature saw in this same masterpiece a considerable danger to its author.

"There is my master-stroke. My Beast, which transcends that of the Apocalypse in horror-compelling reality, is, as was that, a composite creature. I have drawn upon the whole of the seventeen publishers with whom I have had differences. One supplies 'a nervous, deceitful cough,' another 'an overbearing manner,' a third 'a peculiar habit of crossing and recrossing his legs,' a fourth 'a swindling propensity when the day of reckoning arrives,' a fifth 'a thoroughly unclean and lascivious life,' a sixth 'a filthy habit of spitting into the fireplace from every conceivable angle of his room,' a seventh – "

"Enough! I must be off," laughed Dick Little. "I suppose it's all right; but one of these days you'll get yourself into a bit of a mess. There may be the devil to pay over this even."

Dare smiled indulgently as he shook hands.

"Good-bye, my Æsculapius," he said. "If there's trouble, I have behind me the whole of the members of the Barabbas Club, representing eight hundred and thirteen volumes, and the brains of the country. Good-bye." There was a note of weariness about Dare's voice. Materialism was exceedingly tedious.

"Well, it's his affair, not mine," muttered Dick Little to himself as he descended the stairs of Dare's flat; "but they don't fight with books in the King's Bench Division."

II

Three weeks later, on returning from a fortnight's holiday in Scotland, Dick Little found awaiting him at his chambers the following note from Dare: —

"Come round at once. There is not the Devil, but the publishers to pay. Bring a hypodermic syringe and a pint of morphia. – "J.D."

Dick Little had been out of the world, and he had forgotten all about *The Damning of a Soul* and his own misgivings. Having seen a few of his more important patients, he walked round to his friend's flat and found Dare in a pathetic state of gloom.

"Have you brought the hypodermic syringe and the morphia?" he asked without troubling to greet his visitor.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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