
ARTHUR MACHEN
THE HOUSE OF SOULS

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Introduction

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It was somewhere, I think, towards the autumn of the year 1889 that the thought occurred to me that I might perhaps try to write a little in the modern way. For, hitherto, I had been, as it were, wearing costume in literature. The rich, figured English of the earlier part of the seventeenth century had always had a peculiar attraction for me. I accustomed myself to write in it, to think in it; I kept a diary in that manner, and half-unconsciously dressed up my every day thoughts and common experiences in the habit of the Cavalier or of the Caroline Divine. Thus, when in 1884 I got a commission to translate the Heptameron, I wrote quite naturally in the language of my favourite period, and, as some critics declare, made my English version somewhat more antique and stiff than the original. And so "The Anatomy of Tobacco" was an exercise in the antique of a different kind; and "The Chronicle of Clemendy" was a volume of tales that tried their hardest to be mediæval; and the translation of the "Moyen de Parvenir" was still a thing in the ancient mode.

It seemed, in fine, to be settled that in literature I was to be a hanger on of the past ages; and I don't quite know how I managed to get away from them. I had finished translating "Casanova"—more modern, but not thoroughly up to date—and I had nothing particular on hand, and, somehow or other, it struck me that I might try a little writing for the papers. I began with a "turnover" as it was called, for the old vanished Globe, a harmless little article on old English

proverbs; and I shall never forget my pride and delight when one day, being at Dover, with a fresh autumn wind blowing from the sea, I bought a chance copy of the paper and saw my essay on the front page. Naturally, I was encouraged to persevere, and I wrote more turnovers for the Globe and then tried the St. James's Gazette and found that they paid two pounds instead of the guinea of the Globe, and again, naturally enough, devoted most of my attention to the St. James's Gazette. From the essay or literary paper, I somehow got into the habit of the short story, and did a good many of these, still for the St. James's, till in the autumn of 1890, I wrote a tale called "The Double Return." Well, Oscar Wilde asked: "Are you the author of that story that fluttered the dovecotes? I thought it was very good." But: it did flutter the dovecotes, and the St. James's Gazette and I parted.

But I still wrote short stories, now chiefly for what were called "society" papers, which have become extinct. And one of these appeared in a paper, the name of which I have long forgotten. I had called the tale "Resurrectio Mortuorum," and the editor had very sensibly rendered the title into "The Resurrection of the Dead."

I do not clearly remember how the story began. I am inclined to think something in this way:

"Old Mr. Llewellyn, the Welsh antiquary, threw his copy of the morning paper on the floor and banged the breakfast-table, exclaiming: 'Good God! Here's the last of the Caradocs of the Garth, has been married in a Baptist Chapel by a dissenting preacher; somewhere in Peckham.'" Or, did I take up the tale a few years after this happy event and

shew the perfectly cheerful contented young commercial clerk running somewhat too fast to catch the bus one morning, and feeling dazed all day long over the office work, and going home in a sort of dimness, and then at his very doorstep, recovering as it were, his ancestral consciousness. I think it was the sight of his wife and the tones of her voice that suddenly announced to him with the sound of a trumpet that he had nothing to do with this woman with the Cockney accent, or the pastor who was coming to supper, or the red brick villa, or Peckham or the City of London. Though the old place on the banks of the Usk had been sold fifty years before, still, he was Caradoc of the Garth. I forget how I ended the story: but here was one of the sources of "A Fragment of Life."

And somehow, though the tale was written and printed and paid for; it stayed with me as a tale half told in the years from 1890 to 1899. I was in love with the notion: this contrast between the raw London suburb and its mean limited life and its daily journeys to the City; its utter banality and lack of significance; between all this and the old, grey mullioned house under the forest near the river, the armorial bearings on the Jacobean porch, and noble old traditions: all this captivated me and I thought of my mistold tale at intervals, while I was writing "The Great God Pan," "The Red Hand," "The Three Impostors," "The Hill of Dreams," "The White People," and "Hieroglyphics." It was at the back of my head, I suppose, all the time, and at last in '99 I began to write it all over again from a somewhat different standpoint.

The fact was that one grey Sunday afternoon in the March of that year, I went for a long walk with a friend. I was living in Gray's Inn in those days, and we stravaged up Gray's Inn Road on one of those queer, unscientific explorations of the odd corners of London in which I have always delighted. I don't think that there was any definite scheme laid down; but we resisted manifold temptations. For on the right of Gray's Inn Road is one of the oddest quarters of London—to those, that is, with the unsealed eyes. Here are streets of 1800-1820 that go down into a valley—Flora in "Little Dorrit" lived in one of them—and then crossing King's Cross Road climb very steeply up to heights which always suggest to me that I am in the hinder and poorer quarter of some big seaside place, and that there is a fine view of the sea from the attic windows. This place was once called Spa Fields, and has very properly an old meeting house of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connection as one of its attractions. It is one of the parts of London which would attract me if I wished to hide; not to escape arrest, perhaps, but rather to escape the possibility of ever meeting anybody who had ever seen me before.

But: my friend and I resisted it all. We strolled along to the parting of many ways at King's Cross Station, and struck boldly up Pentonville. Again: on our left was Barnsbury, which is like Africa. In Barnsbury semper aliquid novi, but our course was laid for us by some occult influence, and we came to Islington and chose the right hand side of the way. So far, we were tolerably in the region of the known, since every year there is the great Cattle Show at Islington, and many men go there. But, trending to the right, we got into

Canonbury, of which there are only Travellers' Tales. Now and then, perhaps, as one sits about the winter fire, while the storm howls without and the snow falls fast, the silent man in the corner has told how he had a great aunt who lived in Canonbury in 1860; so in the fourteenth century you might meet men who had talked with those who had been in Cathay and had seen the splendours of the Grand Cham. Such is Canonbury; I hardly dare speak of its dim squares, of the deep, leafy back-gardens behind the houses, running down into obscure alleyways with discreet, mysterious postern doors: as I say, "Travellers' Tales"; things not much credited.

But, he who adventures in London has a foretaste of infinity. There is a region beyond Ultima Thule. I know not how it was, but on this famous Sunday afternoon, my friend and I, passing through Canonbury came into something called the Balls Pond Road—Mr. Perch, the messenger of Dombey & Son, lived somewhere in this region—and so I think by Dalston down into Hackney where caravans, or trams, or, as I think you say in America, trolley cars set out at stated intervals to the limits of the western world.

But in the course of that walk which had become an exploration of the unknown, I had seen two common things which had made a profound impression upon me. One of these things was a street, the other a small family party. The street was somewhere in that vague, uncharted, Balls Pond-Dalston region. It was a long street and a grey street. Each house was exactly like every other house. Each house had a basement, the sort of story which house-agents have grown to call of late a "lower ground floor." The front windows of

these basements were half above the patch of black, soot-smeared soil and coarse grass that named itself a garden, and so, passing along at the hour of four o'clock or four-thirty, I could see that in everyone of these "breakfast rooms"—their technical name—the tea tray and the tea cups were set out in readiness. I received from this trivial and natural circumstance an impression of a dull life, laid out in dreadful lines of patterned uniformity, of a life without adventure of body or soul.

Then, the family party. It got into the tram down Hackney way. There were father, mother and baby; and I should think that they came from a small shop, probably from a small draper's shop. The parents were young people of twenty-five to thirty-five. He wore a black shiny frock coat—an "Albert" in America?—a high hat, little side whiskers and dark moustache and a look of amiable vacuity. His wife was oddly bedizened in black satin, with a wide spreading hat, not ill-looking, simply unmeaning. I fancy that she had at times, not too often, "a temper of her own." And the very small baby sat upon her knee. The party was probably going forth to spend the Sunday evening with relations or friends.

And yet, I said to myself, these two have partaken together of the great mystery, of the great sacrament of nature, of the source of all that is magical in the wide world. But have they discerned the mysteries? Do they know that they have been in that place which is called Syon and Jerusalem?—I am quoting from an old book and a strange book.

It was thus that, remembering the old story of the "Resurrection of the Dead," I was furnished with the source

of "A Fragment of Life." I was writing "Hieroglyphics" at the time, having just finished "The White People"; or rather, having just decided that what now appears in print under that heading was all that would ever be written, that the Great Romance that should have been written—in manifestation of the idea—would never be written at all. And so, when Hieroglyphics was finished, somewhere about May 1899, I set about "A Fragment of Life" and wrote the first chapter with the greatest relish and the utmost ease. And then my own life was dashed into fragments. I ceased to write. I travelled. I saw Syon and Bagdad and other strange places—see "Things Near and Far" for an explanation of this obscure passage—and found myself in the lighted world of floats and battens, entering L. U. E., crossing R and exiting R 3; and doing all sorts of queer things.

But still, in spite of all these shocks and changes, the "notion" would not leave me. I went at it again, I suppose in 1904; consumed with a bitter determination to finish what I had begun. Everything now had become difficult. I tried this way and that way and the other way. They all failed and I broke down on every one of them; and I tried and tried again. At last I cobbled up some sort of an end, an utterly bad one, as I realized as I wrote every single line and word of it, and the story appeared, in 1904 or 1905, in Horlick's Magazine under the editorship of my old and dear friend, A. E. Waite.

Still; I was not satisfied. That end was intolerable and I knew it. Again, I sat down to the work, night after night I wrestled with it. And I remember an odd circumstance which

may or may not be of some physiological interest. I was then living in a circumscribed "upper part" of a house in Cosway Street, Marylebone Road. That I might struggle by myself, I wrote in the little kitchen; and night after night as I fought grimly, savagely, all but hopelessly for some fit close for "A Fragment of Life," I was astonished and almost alarmed to find that my feet developed a sensation of most deadly cold. The room was not cold; I had lit the oven burners of the little gas cooking stove. I was not cold; but my feet were chilled in a quite extraordinary manner, as if they had been packed in ice. At last I took off my slippers with a view of poking my toes into the oven of the stove, and feeling my feet with my hand, I perceived that, in fact, they were not cold at all! But the sensation remained; there, I suppose, you have an odd case of a transference of something that was happening in the brain to the extremities. My feet were quite warm to the palm of my hand, but to my sense they were frozen. But what a testimony to the fitness of the American idiom, "cold feet," as signifying a depressed and desponding mood! But, somehow or other, the tale was finished and the "notion" was at last out of my head. I have gone into all this detail about "A Fragment of Life" because I have been assured in many quarters that it is the best thing that I have ever done, and students of the crooked ways of literature may be interested to hear of the abominable labours of doing it.

"The White People" belongs to the same year as the first chapter of "A Fragment of Life," 1899, which was also the year of "Hieroglyphics." The fact was I was in high literary spirits, just then. I had been harassed and worried for a

whole year in the office of Literature, a weekly paper published by The Times, and getting free again, I felt like a prisoner released from chains; ready to dance in letters to any extent. Forthwith I thought of "A Great Romance," a highly elaborate and elaborated piece of work, full of the strangest and rarest things. I have forgotten how it was that this design broke down; but I found by experiment that the great romance was to go on that brave shelf of the unwritten books, the shelf where all the splendid books are to be found in their golden bindings. "The White People" is a small piece of salvage from the wreck. Oddly enough, as is insinuated in the Prologue, the mainspring of the story is to be sought in a medical textbook. In the Prologue reference is made to a review article by Dr. Coryn. But I have since found out that Dr. Coryn was merely quoting from a scientific treatise that case of the lady whose fingers became violently inflamed because she saw a heavy window sash descend on the fingers of her child. With this instance, of course, are to be considered all cases of stigmata, both ancient and modern: and then the question is obvious enough: what limits can we place to the powers of the imagination? Has not the imagination the potentiality at least of performing any miracle, however marvelous, however incredible, according to our ordinary standards? As to the decoration of the story, that is a mingling which I venture to think somewhat ingenious of odds and ends of folk lore and witch lore with pure inventions of my own. Some years later I was amused to receive a letter from a gentleman who was, if I remember, a schoolmaster somewhere in Malaya. This gentleman, an earnest student

of folklore, was writing an article on some singular things he had observed amongst the Malayans, and chiefly a kind of were-wolf state into which some of them were able to conjure themselves. He had found, as he said, startling resemblances between the magic ritual of Malaya and some of the ceremonies and practices hinted at in "The White People." He presumed that all this was not fancy but fact; that is that I was describing practices actually in use among superstitious people on the Welsh border; he was going to quote from me in the article for the Journal of the Folk Lore Society, or whatever it was called, and he just wanted to let me know. I wrote in a hurry to the folklore journal to bid them beware: for the instances selected by the student were all fictions of my own brain!

"The Great God Pan" and "The Inmost Light" are tales of an earlier date, going back to 1890, '91, '92. I have written a good deal about them in "Far Off Things," and in a preface to an edition of "The Great God Pan," published by Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall in 1916, I have described at length the origins of the book. But I must quote anew some extracts from the reviews which welcomed "The Great God Pan" to my extraordinary entertainment, hilarity and refreshment. Here are a few of the best:

"It is not Mr. Machen's fault but his misfortune, that one shakes with laughter rather than with dread over the contemplation of his psychological bogey."—Observer.

"His horror, we regret to say, leaves us quite cold ... and our flesh obstinately refuses to creep."—Chronicle.

"His bogies don't scare."—Sketch.

"We are afraid he only succeeds in being ridiculous."—Manchester Guardian.

"Gruesome, ghastly and dull."—Lady's Pictorial.

"Incoherent nightmare of sex ... which would soon lead to insanity if unrestrained ... innocuous from its absurdity."—Westminster Gazette.

And so on, and so on. Several papers, I remember, declared that "The Great God Pan" was simply a stupid and incompetent rehash of Huysmans' "Là-Bas" and "À Rebours." I had not read these books so I got them both. Thereon, I perceived that my critics had not read them either.

A Fragment of Life

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I

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Edward Darnell awoke from a dream of an ancient wood, and of a clear well rising into grey film and vapour beneath a misty, glimmering heat; and as his eyes opened he saw the sunlight bright in the room, sparkling on the varnish of the new furniture. He turned and found his wife's place vacant, and with some confusion and wonder of the dream still lingering in his mind, he rose also, and began hurriedly to set about his dressing, for he had overslept a little, and the 'bus passed the corner at 9.15. He was a tall, thin man, dark-haired and dark-eyed, and in spite of the routine of the City, the counting of coupons, and all the mechanical

drudgery that had lasted for ten years, there still remained about him the curious hint of a wild grace, as if he had been born a creature of the antique wood, and had seen the fountain rising from the green moss and the grey rocks.

The breakfast was laid in the room on the ground floor, the back room with the French windows looking on the garden, and before he sat down to his fried bacon he kissed his wife seriously and dutifully. She had brown hair and brown eyes, and though her lovely face was grave and quiet, one would have said that she might have awaited her husband under the old trees, and bathed in the pool hollowed out of the rocks.

They had a good deal to talk over while the coffee was poured out and the bacon eaten, and Darnell's egg brought in by the stupid, staring servant-girl of the dusty face. They had been married for a year, and they had got on excellently, rarely sitting silent for more than an hour, but for the past few weeks Aunt Marian's present had afforded a subject for conversation which seemed inexhaustible. Mrs. Darnell had been Miss Mary Reynolds, the daughter of an auctioneer and estate agent in Notting Hill, and Aunt Marian was her mother's sister, who was supposed rather to have lowered herself by marrying a coal merchant, in a small way, at Turnham Green. Marian had felt the family attitude a good deal, and the Reynoldses were sorry for many things that had been said, when the coal merchant saved money and took up land on building leases in the neighbourhood of Crouch End, greatly to his advantage, as it appeared. Nobody had thought that Nixon could ever do very much; but he and his wife had been living for years in a beautiful

house at Barnet, with bow-windows, shrubs, and a paddock, and the two families saw but little of each other, for Mr. Reynolds was not very prosperous. Of course, Aunt Marian and her husband had been asked to Mary's wedding, but they had sent excuses with a nice little set of silver apostle spoons, and it was feared that nothing more was to be looked for. However, on Mary's birthday her aunt had written a most affectionate letter, enclosing a cheque for a hundred pounds from 'Robert' and herself, and ever since the receipt of the money the Darnells had discussed the question of its judicious disposal. Mrs. Darnell had wished to invest the whole sum in Government securities, but Mr. Darnell had pointed out that the rate of interest was absurdly low, and after a good deal of talk he had persuaded his wife to put ninety pounds of the money in a safe mine, which was paying five per cent. This was very well, but the remaining ten pounds, which Mrs. Darnell had insisted on reserving, gave rise to legends and discourses as interminable as the disputes of the schools.

At first Mr. Darnell had proposed that they should furnish the 'spare' room. There were four bedrooms in the house: their own room, the small one for the servant, and two others overlooking the garden, one of which had been used for storing boxes, ends of rope, and odd numbers of 'Quiet Days' and 'Sunday Evenings,' besides some worn suits belonging to Mr. Darnell which had been carefully wrapped up and laid by, as he scarcely knew what to do with them. The other room was frankly waste and vacant, and one Saturday afternoon, as he was coming home in the 'bus, and while he revolved that difficult question of the ten pounds,

the unseemly emptiness of the spare room suddenly came into his mind, and he glowed with the idea that now, thanks to Aunt Marian, it could be furnished. He was busied with this delightful thought all the way home, but when he let himself in, he said nothing to his wife, since he felt that his idea must be matured. He told Mrs. Darnell that, having important business, he was obliged to go out again directly, but that he should be back without fail for tea at half-past six; and Mary, on her side, was not sorry to be alone, as she was a little behindhand with the household books. The fact was, that Darnell, full of the design of furnishing the spare bedroom, wished to consult his friend Wilson, who lived at Fulham, and had often given him judicious advice as to the laying out of money to the very best advantage. Wilson was connected with the Bordeaux wine trade, and Darnell's only anxiety was lest he should not be at home.

However, it was all right; Darnell took a tram along the Goldhawk Road, and walked the rest of the way, and was delighted to see Wilson in the front garden of his house, busy amongst his flower-beds.

'Haven't seen you for an age,' he said cheerily, when he heard Darnell's hand on the gate; 'come in. Oh, I forgot,' he added, as Darnell still fumbled with the handle, and vainly attempted to enter. 'Of course you can't get in; I haven't shown it you.'

It was a hot day in June, and Wilson appeared in a costume which he had put on in haste as soon as he arrived from the City. He wore a straw hat with a neat pugaree protecting the back of his neck, and his dress was a Norfolk jacket and knickers in heather mixture.

'See,' he said, as he let Darnell in; 'see the dodge. You don't *turn* the handle at all. First of all push hard, and then pull. It's a trick of my own, and I shall have it patented. You see, it keeps undesirable characters at a distance—such a great thing in the suburbs. I feel I can leave Mrs. Wilson alone now; and, formerly, you have no idea how she used to be pestered.'

'But how about visitors?' said Darnell. 'How do they get in?'

'Oh, we put them up to it. Besides,' he said vaguely, 'there is sure to be somebody looking out. Mrs. Wilson is nearly always at the window. She's out now; gone to call on some friends. The Bennetts' At Home day, I think it is. This is the first Saturday, isn't it? You know J. W. Bennett, don't you? Ah, he's in the House; doing very well, I believe. He put me on to a very good thing the other day.'

'But, I say,' said Wilson, as they turned and strolled towards the front door, 'what do you wear those black things for? You look hot. Look at me. Well, I've been gardening, you know, but I feel as cool as a cucumber. I dare say you don't know where to get these things? Very few men do. Where do you suppose I got 'em?'

'In the West End, I suppose,' said Darnell, wishing to be polite.

'Yes, that's what everybody says. And it is a good cut. Well, I'll tell you, but you needn't pass it on to everybody. I got the tip from Jameson—you know him, "Jim-Jams," in the China trade, 39 Eastbrook—and he said he didn't want everybody in the City to know about it. But just go to

Jennings, in Old Wall, and mention my name, and you'll be all right. And what d'you think they cost?'

'I haven't a notion,' said Darnell, who had never bought such a suit in his life.

'Well, have a guess.'

Darnell regarded Wilson gravely.

The jacket hung about his body like a sack, the knickerbockers drooped lamentably over his calves, and in prominent positions the bloom of the heather seemed about to fade and disappear.

'Three pounds, I suppose, at least,' he said at length.

'Well, I asked Dench, in our place, the other day, and he guessed four ten, and his father's got something to do with a big business in Conduit Street. But I only gave thirty-five and six. To measure? Of course; look at the cut, man.'

Darnell was astonished at so low a price.

'And, by the way,' Wilson went on, pointing to his new brown boots, 'you know where to go for shoe-leather? Oh, I thought everybody was up to that! There's only one place. "Mr. Bill," in Gunning Street,—nine and six.'

They were walking round and round the garden, and Wilson pointed out the flowers in the beds and borders. There were hardly any blossoms, but everything was neatly arranged.

'Here are the tuberous-rooted Glasgownias,' he said, showing a rigid row of stunted plants; 'those are Squintaceæ; this is a new introduction, Moldavia Semperflorida Andersonii; and this is Prattsia.'

'When do they come out?' said Darnell.

'Most of them in the end of August or beginning of September,' said Wilson briefly. He was slightly annoyed with himself for having talked so much about his plants, since he saw that Darnell cared nothing for flowers; and, indeed, the visitor could hardly dissemble vague recollections that came to him; thoughts of an old, wild garden, full of odours, beneath grey walls, of the fragrance of the meadowsweet beside the brook.

'I wanted to consult you about some furniture,' Darnell said at last. 'You know we've got a spare room, and I'm thinking of putting a few things into it. I haven't exactly made up my mind, but I thought you might advise me.'

'Come into my den,' said Wilson. 'No; this way, by the back'; and he showed Darnell another ingenious arrangement at the side door whereby a violent high-toned bell was set pealing in the house if one did but touch the latch. Indeed, Wilson handled it so briskly that the bell rang a wild alarm, and the servant, who was trying on her mistress's things in the bedroom, jumped madly to the window and then danced a hysteric dance. There was plaster found on the drawing-room table on Sunday afternoon, and Wilson wrote a letter to the 'Fulham Chronicle,' ascribing the phenomenon 'to some disturbance of a seismic nature.'

For the moment he knew nothing of the great results of his contrivance, and solemnly led the way towards the back of the house. Here there was a patch of turf, beginning to look a little brown, with a background of shrubs. In the middle of the turf, a boy of nine or ten was standing all alone, with something of an air.

'The eldest,' said Wilson. 'Havelock. Well, Lockie, what are ye doing now? And where are your brother and sister?'

The boy was not at all shy. Indeed, he seemed eager to explain the course of events.

'I'm playing at being Gawd,' he said, with an engaging frankness. 'And I've sent Fergus and Janet to the bad place. That's in the shrubbery. And they're never to come out any more. And they're burning for ever and ever.'

'What d'you think of that?' said Wilson admiringly. 'Not bad for a youngster of nine, is it? They think a lot of him at the Sunday-school. But come into my den.'

The den was an apartment projecting from the back of the house. It had been designed as a back kitchen and washhouse, but Wilson had draped the 'copper' in art muslin and had boarded over the sink, so that it served as a workman's bench.

'Snug, isn't it?' he said, as he pushed forward one of the two wicker chairs. 'I think out things here, you know; it's quiet. And what about this furnishing? Do you want to do the thing on a grand scale?'

'Oh, not at all. Quite the reverse. In fact, I don't know whether the sum at our disposal will be sufficient. You see the spare room is ten feet by twelve, with a western exposure, and I thought if we *could* manage it, that it would seem more cheerful furnished. Besides, it's pleasant to be able to ask a visitor; our aunt, Mrs. Nixon, for example. But she is accustomed to have everything very nice.'

'And how much do you want to spend?'

'Well, I hardly think we should be justified in going much beyond ten pounds. That isn't enough, eh?'

Wilson got up and shut the door of the back kitchen impressively.

'Look here,' he said, 'I'm glad you came to me in the first place. Now you'll just tell me where you thought of going yourself.'

'Well, I had thought of the Hampstead Road,' said Darnell in a hesitating manner.

'I just thought you'd say that. But I'll ask you, what is the good of going to those expensive shops in the West End? You don't get a better article for your money. You're merely paying for fashion.'

'I've seen some nice things in Samuel's, though. They get a brilliant polish on their goods in those superior shops. We went there when we were married.'

'Exactly, and paid ten per cent more than you need have paid. It's throwing money away. And how much did you say you had to spend? Ten pounds. Well, I can tell you where to get a beautiful bedroom suite, in the very highest finish, for six pound ten. What d'you think of that? China included, mind you; and a square of carpet, brilliant colours, will only cost you fifteen and six. Look here, go any Saturday afternoon to Dick's, in the Seven Sisters Road, mention my name, and ask for Mr. Johnston. The suite's in ash, "Elizabethan" they call it. Six pound ten, including the china, with one of their "Orient" carpets, nine by nine, for fifteen and six. Dick's.'

Wilson spoke with some eloquence on the subject of furnishing. He pointed out that the times were changed, and that the old heavy style was quite out of date.

'You know,' he said, 'it isn't like it was in the old days, when people used to buy things to last hundreds of years. Why, just before the wife and I were married, an uncle of mine died up in the North and left me his furniture. I was thinking of furnishing at the time, and I thought the things might come in handy; but I assure you there wasn't a single article that I cared to give house-room to. All dingy, old mahogany; big bookcases and bureaus, and claw-legged chairs and tables. As I said to the wife (as she was soon afterwards), "We don't exactly want to set up a chamber of horrors, do we?" So I sold off the lot for what I could get. I must confess I like a cheerful room.'

Darnell said he had heard that artists liked the old-fashioned furniture.

'Oh, I dare say. The "unclean cult of the sunflower," eh? You saw that piece in the "Daily Post"? I hate all that rot myself. It isn't healthy, you know, and I don't believe the English people will stand it. But talking of curiosities, I've got something here that's worth a bit of money.'

He dived into some dusty receptacle in a corner of the room, and showed Darnell a small, worm-eaten Bible, wanting the first five chapters of Genesis and the last leaf of the Apocalypse. It bore the date of 1753.

'It's my belief that's worth a lot,' said Wilson. 'Look at the worm-holes. And you see it's "imperfect," as they call it. You've noticed that some of the most valuable books are "imperfect" at the sales?'

The interview came to an end soon after, and Darnell went home to his tea. He thought seriously of taking

Wilson's advice, and after tea he told Mary of his idea and of what Wilson had said about Dick's.

Mary was a good deal taken by the plan when she had heard all the details. The prices struck her as very moderate. They were sitting one on each side of the grate (which was concealed by a pretty cardboard screen, painted with landscapes), and she rested her cheek on her hand, and her beautiful dark eyes seemed to dream and behold strange visions. In reality she was thinking of Darnell's plan.

'It would be very nice in some ways,' she said at last. 'But we must talk it over. What I am afraid of is that it will come to much more than ten pounds in the long run. There are so many things to be considered. There's the bed. It would look shabby if we got a common bed without brass mounts. Then the bedding, the mattress, and blankets, and sheets, and counterpane would all cost something.'

She dreamed again, calculating the cost of all the necessaries, and Darnell stared anxiously; reckoning with her, and wondering what her conclusion would be. For a moment the delicate colouring of her face, the grace of her form, and the brown hair, drooping over her ears and clustering in little curls about her neck, seemed to hint at a language which he had not yet learned; but she spoke again.

'The bedding would come to a great deal, I am afraid. Even if Dick's are considerably cheaper than Boon's or Samuel's. And, my dear, we must have some ornaments on the mantelpiece. I saw some very nice vases at eleven-three the other day at Wilkin and Dodd's. We should want six at

least, and there ought to be a centre-piece. You see how it mounts up.'

Darnell was silent. He saw that his wife was summing up against his scheme, and though he had set his heart on it, he could not resist her arguments.

'It would be nearer twelve pounds than ten,' she said.

'The floor would have to be stained round the carpet (nine by nine, you said?), and we should want a piece of linoleum to go under the washstand. And the walls would look very bare without any pictures.'

'I thought about the pictures,' said Darnell; and he spoke quite eagerly. He felt that here, at least, he was unassailable. 'You know there's the "Derby Day" and the "Railway Station," ready framed, standing in the corner of the box-room already. They're a bit old-fashioned, perhaps, but that doesn't matter in a bedroom. And couldn't we use some photographs? I saw a very neat frame in natural oak in the City, to hold half a dozen, for one and six. We might put in your father, and your brother James, and Aunt Marian, and your grandmother, in her widow's cap—and any of the others in the album. And then there's that old family picture in the hair-trunk—that might do over the mantelpiece.'

'You mean your great-grandfather in the gilt frame? But that's *very* old-fashioned, isn't it? He looks so queer in his wig. I don't think it would quite go with the room, somehow.'

Darnell thought a moment. The portrait was a 'kitcat' of a young gentleman, bravely dressed in the fashion of 1750, and he very faintly remembered some old tales that his father had told him about this ancestor—tales of the woods

and fields, of the deep sunken lanes, and the forgotten country in the west.

'No,' he said, 'I suppose it is rather out of date. But I saw some very nice prints in the City, framed and quite cheap.'

'Yes, but everything counts. Well, we will talk it over, as you say. You know we must be careful.'

The servant came in with the supper, a tin of biscuits, a glass of milk for the mistress, and a modest pint of beer for the master, with a little cheese and butter. Afterwards Edward smoked two pipes of honeydew, and they went quietly to bed; Mary going first, and her husband following a quarter of an hour later, according to the ritual established from the first days of their marriage. Front and back doors were locked, the gas was turned off at the meter, and when Darnell got upstairs he found his wife already in bed, her face turned round on the pillow.

She spoke softly to him as he came into the room.

'It would be impossible to buy a presentable bed at anything under one pound eleven, and good sheets are dear, anywhere.'

He slipped off his clothes and slid gently into bed, putting out the candle on the table. The blinds were all evenly and duly drawn, but it was a June night, and beyond the walls, beyond that desolate world and wilderness of grey Shepherd's Bush, a great golden moon had floated up through magic films of cloud, above the hill, and the earth was filled with a wonderful light between red sunset lingering over the mountain and that marvellous glory that shone into the woods from the summit of the hill. Darnell seemed to see some reflection of that wizard brightness in

the room; the pale walls and the white bed and his wife's face lying amidst brown hair upon the pillow were illuminated, and listening he could almost hear the corncrake in the fields, the fern-owl sounding his strange note from the quiet of the rugged place where the bracken grew, and, like the echo of a magic song, the melody of the nightingale that sang all night in the alder by the little brook. There was nothing that he could say, but he slowly stole his arm under his wife's neck, and played with the ringlets of brown hair. She never moved, she lay there gently breathing, looking up to the blank ceiling of the room with her beautiful eyes, thinking also, no doubt, thoughts that she could not utter, kissing her husband obediently when he asked her to do so, and he stammered and hesitated as he spoke.

They were nearly asleep, indeed Darnell was on the very eve of dreaming, when she said very softly—

'I am afraid, darling, that we could never afford it.' And he heard her words through the murmur of the water, dripping from the grey rock, and falling into the clear pool beneath.

Sunday morning was always an occasion of idleness. Indeed, they would never have got breakfast if Mrs. Darnell, who had the instincts of the housewife, had not awoke and seen the bright sunshine, and felt that the house was too still. She lay quiet for five minutes, while her husband slept beside her, and listened intently, waiting for the sound of Alice stirring down below. A golden tube of sunlight shone through some opening in the Venetian blinds, and it shone on the brown hair that lay about her head on the pillow, and

she looked steadily into the room at the 'duchesse' toilet-table, the coloured ware of the washstand, and the two photogravures in oak frames, 'The Meeting' and 'The Parting,' that hung upon the wall. She was half dreaming as she listened for the servant's footsteps, and the faint shadow of a shade of a thought came over her, and she imagined dimly, for the quick moment of a dream, another world where rapture was wine, where one wandered in a deep and happy valley, and the moon was always rising red above the trees. She was thinking of Hampstead, which represented to her the vision of the world beyond the walls, and the thought of the heath led her away to Bank Holidays, and then to Alice. There was not a sound in the house; it might have been midnight for the stillness if the drawling cry of the Sunday paper had not suddenly echoed round the corner of Edna Road, and with it came the warning clank and shriek of the milkman with his pails.

Mrs. Darnell sat up, and wide awake, listened more intently. The girl was evidently fast asleep, and must be roused, or all the work of the day would be out of joint, and she remembered how Edward hated any fuss or discussion about household matters, more especially on a Sunday, after his long week's work in the City. She gave her husband an affectionate glance as he slept on, for she was very fond of him, and so she gently rose from the bed and went in her nightgown to call the maid.

The servant's room was small and stuffy, the night had been very hot, and Mrs. Darnell paused for a moment at the door, wondering whether the girl on the bed was really the dusty-faced servant who bustled day by day about the

house, or even the strangely bedizened creature, dressed in purple, with a shiny face, who would appear on the Sunday afternoon, bringing in an early tea, because it was her 'evening out.' Alice's hair was black and her skin was pale, almost of the olive tinge, and she lay asleep, her head resting on one arm, reminding Mrs. Darnell of a queer print of a 'Tired Bacchante' that she had seen long ago in a shop window in Upper Street, Islington. And a cracked bell was ringing; that meant five minutes to eight, and nothing done.

She touched the girl gently on the shoulder, and only smiled when her eyes opened, and waking with a start, she got up in sudden confusion. Mrs. Darnell went back to her room and dressed slowly while her husband still slept, and it was only at the last moment, as she fastened her cherry-coloured bodice, that she roused him, telling him that the bacon would be overdone unless he hurried over his dressing.

Over the breakfast they discussed the question of the spare room all over again. Mrs. Darnell still admitted that the plan of furnishing it attracted her, but she could not see how it could be done for the ten pounds, and as they were prudent people they did not care to encroach on their savings. Edward was highly paid, having (with allowances for extra work in busy weeks) a hundred and forty pounds a year, and Mary had inherited from an old uncle, her godfather, three hundred pounds, which had been judiciously laid out in mortgage at 4½ per cent. Their total income, then, counting in Aunt Marian's present, was a hundred and fifty-eight pounds a year, and they were clear of debt, since Darnell had bought the furniture for the house