Twelve Tales

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INTRODUCTION

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The existence of this volume is due, not to my own initiative, but to that of my enterprising kinsman and publisher, ***Mr. Grant Richards****. He it was who first suggested to me the idea that it might be worth while to collect in one volume such of my scattered short stories as I judged to possess most permanent value. In order for us to carry out his plan, however, it became necessary to obtain the friendly co-operation of* ***Messrs. Chatto and Windus****, to whom belong the copyrights of my three previous volumes of Collected Tales, published respectively under the titles of* ***Strange Stories****,* ***The Beckoning Hand****, and* ***Ivan Greet's Masterpiece****, some pieces from each of which series I desired to include in the present selection. Fortunately,* ***Messrs. Chatto and Windus*** *fell in with our scheme with that kindness which I have learned to expect from them in all their dealings; and an arrangement was thus effected by which I am enabled to present here certain stories from their three volumes. Together with these I have arranged an equal number of tales from other sources—most of which have hitherto appeared in periodicals only, while one is entirely new, never having been before printed.*

I may perhaps be permitted, without blame, to seize the occasion of this selected edition in order to offer a few ***bibliographical remarks*** *on the origin and inception of my short stories. For many years after I took to the trade of author, I confined my writings to scientific or quasi-scientific subjects, having indeed little or no idea that I possessed in*

the germ the faculty of story-telling. But on one occasion, about the year 1880 (if I recollect aright), wishing to contribute an article to ***Belgravia*** *on the improbability of a man's being able to recognise a ghost as such, even if he saw one, and the impossibility of his being able to apply any test of credibility to an apparition's statements, I ventured for the better development of my subject to throw the argument into the form of a narrative. I did not regard this narrative as a story: I looked upon it merely as a convenient method of displaying a scientific truth. However, the gods and* ***Mr. Chatto*** *thought otherwise. For, a month or two later,* ***Mr. Chatto*** *wrote to ask me if I could supply* ***Belgravia*** *with 'another story.' Not a little surprised at this request, I sat down, like an obedient workman, and tried to write one at my employer's bidding. I distrusted my own ability to do so, it is true: but* ***Mr. Chatto****, I thought, being a dealer in the article, must know better than I; and I was far too poor a craftsman at that time to refuse any reasonable offer of employment. So I did my best,* ***crassa Minerva****. To my great astonishment, my second story was accepted and printed like my first: the curious in such matters (if there be any) will find them both in the volume entitled* ***Strange Stories*** *(published by* ***Messrs. Chatto and Windus****) under the headings of 'Our Scientific Observations on a Ghost,' and 'My New Year's Eve among the Mummies.'*

From that day forward for some years I continued at ***Mr. Chatto's*** *request to supply short stories from time to time to* ***Belgravia****, a magazine which he then edited. But I did not regard these my tentative tales in any serious light: and, fearing that they might stand in the way of such little*

scientific reputation as I possessed, I published them all under the prudent pseudonym of ***J. Arbuthnot Wilson****. I do not know that I should have got much further on the downward path which leads to fiction, had it not been for the intervention of my good friend the late* ***Mr. James Payn****. When he undertook the editorship of the* ***Cornhill****, he determined at first to turn it into a magazine of stories only, and began to look about him for fresh blood to press into the service. Among the writers he then secured (I seem to recollect) were* ***Dr. Conan Doyle*** *and* ***Mr. Stanley Weyman****. Now, under* ***Mr. Leslie Stephen's*** *editorship, I had been accustomed to contribute to the* ***Cornhill*** *occasional papers on scientific subjects: and one morning, by an odd coincidence, I received two notes simultaneously from the new editor. The first of them was addressed to me by my real name; in it,* ***Mr. Payn*** *courteously but briefly informed me that he returned one such scientific article which I had sent for his consideration, as he had determined in future to exclude everything but fiction from the magazine—a decision which he afterwards saw reason to rescind. The second letter, forwarded through* ***Messrs. Chatto and Windus****, was addressed to me under my assumed name of* ***J. Arbuthnot Wilson****, and begged that unknown person to submit to* ***Mr. Payn*** *a few stories 'like your admirable* ***Mr. Chung****.' Now, this* ***Mr. Chung*** *was a tale of a Chinese* ***attaché*** *in England, who fell in love with an English girl: I had first printed it, like the others of that date, in the pages of* ***Belgravia****. (Later on, it was included in the volume of* ***Strange Stories****, where any hypothetical explorer may still find it.) Till that moment, I had never*

regarded my excursions into fiction in any serious light, setting down ***Mr. Chatto's*** *liking for them to that gentleman's amiability, or else to his well-known scientific* ***penchant****. But when a novelist like* ***Mr. James Payn*** *spoke well of my work—nay, more; desired to secure it for his practically new magazine—I began to think there might really be something in my stories worth following up by a more serious effort.*

Thus encouraged, I launched out upon what I venture to think was the first voyage ever made in our time into the Romance of the Clash of Races—since so much exploited. I wrote two short stories, 'The Reverend John Creedy' and 'The Curate of Churnside,' both of which I sent to ***Mr. Payn****, in response to his invitation. He was kind enough to like them, and they were duly published in the* ***Cornhill****. At the time, their reception was disappointing: but gradually, since then, I have learned from incidental remarks that many people read them and remembered them; indeed, I have reason to think that these first serious efforts of mine at telling a story were among my most successful attempts at the art of fiction. Once launched as a professional story-teller by this fortuitous combination of circumstances, I continued at the trade, and wrote a number of tales for the* ***Cornhill*** *and other magazines, up till the year 1884, when I collected a few of them into a volume of* ***Strange Stories****, under my own name, for the first time casting off the veil of anonymity or the cloak of a pseudonym. In the same year I also began my career as a novelist properly so called, by producing my first long novel,* ***Philistia****.*

From that date forward, I have gone on writing a great many stories, long and short, whose name is Legion. Out of the whole number of shorter ones, I now select the present set, as illustrating best in different keys the various types of tale to which I have devoted myself.

Four of these pieces have already appeared as reprints in the volume entitled ***Strange Stories****—namely, 'The Reverend John Creedy,' from the* ***Cornhill****; 'The Child of the Phalanstery,' from* ***Belgravia****; and 'The Curate of Churnside' and 'The Backslider,' both from the* ***Cornhill****. One, 'John Cann's Treasure,' also from the* ***Cornhill****, has been reprinted in the volume called* ***The Beckoning Hand****. Two more have been included in the collection entitled* ***Ivan Greet's Masterpiece****: namely, 'Ivan Greet's Masterpiece' itself, originally issued as a Christmas number of the* ***Graphic****; and 'The Abbé's Repentance,' which first saw the light in the* ***Contemporary Review****. The remainder have never appeared before, except in periodicals. The Headpiece, 'A Confidential Communication,' came out in the* ***Sketch****. So did 'Frasine's First Communion.' 'Wolverden Tower' formed a Christmas number of the* ***Illustrated London News****. 'Janet's Nemesis' was contributed to the* ***Pall Mall Magazine****. The Intermezzo, 'Langalula,' is from the* ***Speaker****, as is also the Tailpiece, 'A Matter of Standpoint.' 'Cecca's Lover' made his original bow in* ***Longman's Magazine****. Finally, 'The Churchwarden's Brother' is entirely new, never having appeared in public before on this or any other stage. I have to thank the editors and proprietors of the various periodicals above enumerated for their*

courteous permission to present afresh the contributions to their respective pages.

I set forth this little Collection of Tales in all humility, and with no small diffidence. In an age so prolific in high genius as our own, I know how hard it is for mere modest industry to catch the ear of a too pampered public. I shall be amply content if our masters permit me to pick up the crumbs that fall from the table of the Hardys, the Kiplings, the Merediths, and the Wellses.

G. A.

HEADPIECE

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A CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION

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Ah, he *was* a mean-spirited beggar, that fellow Sibthorpe! As mean-spirited a beggar as ever *I* come across. Yes, that's who I mean; that's him; the fellow as was murdered. I s'pose you'd call it murdered, now I come to think of it. But, Lord, he was such a mean-spirited chap, he wouldn't be enough to 'ang a dog for!

'Charitable,' eh? 'A distinguished philanthropist!' Well, I can't say as *I* ever thought much of his philanthropy. He was always down on them as tries to earn a honest livin' tramping about the country. Know how he was murdered? Well, yes, I should think I did! I'm just about the fust livin' authority in England on that there subjeck.

Well, come to that, I don't mind if I do tell you. You're a straight sort of chap, you are. You're one of these 'ere politicals. I ain't afraid o' trustin' you. You're not one of them as 'ud peach on a pal to 'andle a reward o' fifty guineas. And it's a rum story too. But mind, I tell you what I tell you in confidence. There's not another chap in all this prison I'd tell as much to.

I'd always knowed 'im, since I was no bigger nor that. Old fool he was too; down on public-'ouses an' races an' such, an' always ready to subscribe to anything for the elevation of the people. People don't want to be elevated, says I; silly

pack o' modern new-fangled rubbish. I sticks to the public-'ouses.

Well, we was dead-beat that day. Liz an' me had tramped along all the way from Aldershot. Last we come to the black lane by the pine-trees after you've crossed the heath. Loneliest spot just there that I know in England. The Gibbet 'Ill's to the right, where the men was hung in chains; and the copse is to the left, where we 'ad that little brush one time with the keepers. Liz sat down on the heather—she was dead-beat, she was—behind a clump o' fuzz. An' I lay down beside 'er.

She was a good 'un, Liz. She followed me down through thick and thin like a good 'un. No bloomin' nonsense about Liz, I can tell you. I always liked 'er. And though I *did* get into a row with her that mornin' afore she died, and kick 'er about the ribs a bit—but, there, I'm a-digressin', as the parson put it; and the jury brought it in 'Death by misadventure.' That was a narrow squeak that time. I didn't think I'd swing for 'er, 'cause she 'it me fust; but I did think they'd 'a' brought it in somethin' like manslaughter.

However, as I say, I'm a-digressin' from the story. It was like this with old Sibthorpe. We was a-lyin' under the gorse bushes, wonderin' to ourselves 'ow we'd raise the wind for a drink—for we was both of us just about as dry as they make 'em—when suddenly round the corner, with his 'at in his 'and, and his white 'air a-blowin' round his 'ead, like an old fool as he was, who should come but the doctor. Liz looks at me, and I looks at Liz.

'It's that bloomin' old idjit, Dr. Sibthorpe,' says she. 'He give me a week once.'

I 'ad my knife in my 'and. I looks at it, like this: then I looks up at Liz. She laughs and nods at me. 'E couldn't see neither of us behind the bush of fuzz. 'Arst 'im fust,' says Liz, low; 'an' then, if he don't fork out——' She drawed her finger so, right across her throat, an' smiles. Oh, the *was* a good 'un!

Well, up I goes an' begins, reglar asker's style. 'You ain't got a copper about you, sir,' says I, whinin' like, 'as you could give a pore man as has tramped, without a bit or a sup, all the way from Aldershot?'

'E looks at me an' smiles—the mean old hypocrite! 'I never give to tramps,' says 'e. Then 'e looks at me agin. 'I know you,' says 'e. 'You've been up afore me often.'

'An' I knows *you*,' says I, drawin' the knife; 'an' I knows where you keeps your money. An' I ain't a-goin' to be up afore you agin, not if *I* knows it.' An', with that, I rushes up, an' just goes at him blind with it.

Well, he fought like a good 'un for his life, that he did. You wouldn't 'a' thought the old fool had so much fight left in him. But Liz stuck to me like a brick, an' we got him down at last, an' I gave him one or two about the 'ead as quieted him. It was mostly kickin'—no blood to speak of. Then we dragged him aside among the heather, and covered him up a little bit, an' made all tidy on the road where we'd stuck him.

'Take his watch, Liz,' says I.

Well, would you believe it? He was a magistrate for the county, and lived in the 'All, an' was 'eld the richest gentleman for ten mile about; but when Liz fished out his

watch, what sort do you think it was? I give you my word for it, a common Waterbury!

'You put that back, Liz,' says I. 'Put that back in the old fool's pocket. Don't go carryin' it about to incriminate yourself, free, gratis, for nothin',' says I; 'it ain't worth sixpence.'

''Ave you his purse?' says she.

'Yes, I 'ave,' says I. 'An' when we gets round the corner, we'll see what's in it.'

Well, so we did; an', would you believe it, agin, when we come to look, there was two ha'penny stamps and a lock of a child's 'air; and, s'elp me taters, that's all that was in it!

'It ain't right,' says I, 'for people to go about takin' in other people with regard to their wealth,' says I. ''Ere's this bloomin' old fool 'as misled us into s'posing he was the richest man in all the county, and not a penny in his purse! It's downright dishonest.'

Liz snatches it from me, an' turns it inside out. But it worn't no good. Not another thing in it!

Well, she looks at me, an' I looks at her. 'You fool,' says she, 'to get us both into a blindfold scrape like this, without knowin' whether or not he'd got the money about him! I guess we'll both swing for it.'

'You told me to,' says I.

'That's a lie,' says she. Liz was always free-spoken.

I took her by the throat. 'Young woman,' says I, 'you keep a civil tongue in your 'ead,' says I, 'or, by George, you'll follow him!'

Then we looks at one another agin; and the humour of it comes over us—I was always one as 'ad a sense of humour

—an' we busts out laughin'.

'Sold!' says I.

'Sold!' says Liz, half cryin'.

An' we both sat down, an' looked agin at one another like a pair of born idjits.

Then it come over us gradjally what a pack o' fools that there man had made of us. The longer I thought of it, the angrier it made me. The mean-spirited old blackguard! To be walking around the roads without a penny upon him!

'You go back, Liz,' says I, 'an' put that purse where we found it, in his weskit pocket.'

Liz looked at me an' crouched. 'I daren't,' says she, cowerin'. She was beginning to get frightened.

I took her by the 'air. 'By George!' says I, 'if you don't——' An' she saw I meant it.

Well, back she crawled, rather than walked, all shiverin'; an', as for me, I set there on the heather an' watched her. By an' by, she crawled round again. 'Done it?' says I. An' Liz, lookin' white as a sheet, says, 'Yes, I done it.'

'I wasn't goin' to carry that about with me,' says I, 'for the coppers to cop me. Now they'll put it in the papers: "Deceased's watch and purse were found on him untouched, so that robbery was clearly not the motive of the crime." Git up, Liz, you fool, an' come along on with me.'

Up she got, an' come along. We crept down the valley, all tired as we was, without a sup to drink; an' we reached the high-road, all in among the bracken, an' we walked together as far as Godalming. That was all. The p'lice set it down to revenge, an' suspected the farmers. But, ever since then, every time I remember it, it makes me 'ot with rage to think

a man o' property like him should go walking the roads, takin' other people in, without a farden in his pocket. It was the biggest disappointment ever *I* had in my life. To think I might 'a' swung for an old fool like that! A great philanthropist, indeed! Why, he'd ought to 'a' been ashamed o' himself. Not one blessed farden! I tell you, it always makes me 'ot to think o' it.

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THE REVEREND JOHN CREEDY

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'On Sunday next, the 14th inst., the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., of Magdalen College, Oxford, will preach in Walton Magna Church on behalf of the Gold Coast Mission.' Not a very startling announcement that; and yet, simple as it looks, it stirred Ethel Berry's soul to its inmost depths. For Ethel had been brought up by her Aunt Emily to look upon foreign missions as the one thing on earth worth living for and thinking about; and the Reverend John Creedy, B.A., had a missionary history of his own, strange enough even in these strange days of queer juxtapositions between utter savagery and advanced civilisation.

'Only think,' she said to her aunt, as they read the placard on the schoolhouse board, 'he's a real African negro, the vicar says, taken from a slaver on the Gold Coast when he was a child, and brought to England to be educated. He's been to Oxford and got a degree; and now he's going out again to Africa to convert his own people. And he's coming down to the vicar's to stay on Wednesday.'

'It's my belief,' said old Uncle James, Aunt Emily's brother, the superannuated skipper, 'that he'd much better stop in England for ever. I've been a good bit on the Coast myself in my time, after palm oil and such, and my opinion

is that a nigger's a nigger anywhere, but he's a sight less of a nigger in England than out yonder in Africa. Take him to England, and you make a gentleman of him: send him home again, and the nigger comes out at once in spite of you.'

'Oh, James,' Aunt Emily put in, 'how can you talk such unchristianlike talk, setting yourself up against missions, when we know that all the nations of the earth are made of one blood?'

'I've always lived a Christian life myself, Emily,' answered Uncle James, 'though I have cruised a good bit on the Coast, too, which is against it, certainly; but I take it a nigger's a nigger whatever you do with him. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the Scripture says, nor the leopard his spots, and a nigger he'll be to the end of his days; you mark my words, Emily.'

On Wednesday, in due course, the Reverend John Creedy arrived at the vicarage, and much curiosity there was throughout the village of Walton Magna that week to see this curious new thing—a coal-black parson. Next day, Thursday, an almost equally unusual event occurred to Ethel Berry; for, to her great surprise, she got a little note in the morning inviting her up to a tennis-party at the vicarage the same afternoon. Now, though the vicar called on Aunt Emily often enough, and accepted her help readily for school feasts and other village festivities of the milder sort, the Berrys were hardly up to that level of society which is commonly invited to the parson's lawn tennis parties. And the reason why Ethel was asked on this particular Thursday must be traced to a certain pious conspiracy between the vicar and the secretary of the Gold Coast Evangelistic

Society. When those two eminent missionary advocates had met a fortnight before at Exeter Hall, the secretary had represented to the vicar the desirability of young John Creedy's taking to himself an English wife before his departure. 'It will steady him, and keep him right on the Coast,' he said, 'and it will give him importance in the eyes of the natives as well.' Whereto the vicar responded that he knew exactly the right girl to suit the place in his own parish, and that by a providential conjunction she already took a deep interest in foreign missions. So these two good men conspired in all innocence of heart to sell poor Ethel into African slavery; and the vicar had asked John Creedy down to Walton Magna on purpose to meet her.

That afternoon Ethel put on her pretty sateen and her witching little white hat, with two natural dog-roses pinned on one side, and went pleased and proud up to the vicarage. The Reverend John Creedy was there, not in full clerical costume, but arrayed in tennis flannels, with only a loose white tie beneath his flap collar to mark his newly acquired spiritual dignity. He was a comely-looking negro enough, full-blooded, but not too broad-faced nor painfully African in type; and when he was playing tennis his athletic quick limbs and his really handsome build took away greatly from the general impression of an inferior race. His voice was of the ordinary Oxford type, open, pleasant, and refined, with a certain easy-going air of natural gentility, hardly marred by just the faintest tinge of the thick negro blur in the broad vowels. When he talked to Ethel—and the vicar's wife took good care that they should talk together a great deal—his conversation was of a sort that she seldom

heard at Walton Magna. It was full of London and Oxford; of boat-races at Iffley and cricket matches at Lord's; of people and books whose very names Ethel had never heard—one of them was a Mr. Mill, she thought, and another a Mr. Aristotle,—but which she felt vaguely to be one step higher in the intellectual scale than her own level. Then his friends, to whom he alluded casually, not like one who airs his grand acquaintances, were such very distinguished people. There was a real live lord, apparently, at the same college with him, and he spoke of a young baronet whose estate lay close by as plain 'Harrington of Christchurch,' without any 'Sir Arthur'—a thing which even the vicar himself would hardly have ventured to do. She knew that he was learned too; as a matter of fact, he had taken a fair second class in Greats at Oxford; and he could talk delightfully of poetry and novels. To say the truth, John Creedy, in spite of his black face, dazzled poor Ethel, for he was more of a scholar and a gentleman than anybody with whom she had ever before had the chance of conversing on equal terms.

When Ethel turned the course of talk to Africa, the young parson was equally eloquent and fascinating. He didn't care about leaving England for many reasons, but he would be glad to do something for his poor brethren. He was enthusiastic about missions; that was a common interest; and he was so anxious to raise and improve the condition of his fellow-negroes, that Ethel couldn't help feeling what a noble thing it was of him thus to sacrifice himself, cultivated gentleman as he was, in an African jungle, for his heathen countrymen. Altogether, she went home from the tennis-court that afternoon thoroughly overcome by John Creedy's

personality. She didn't for a moment think of falling in love with him—a certain indescribable race-instinct set up an impassable barrier against that—but she admired him and was interested in him in a way that she had never yet felt with any other man.

As for John Creedy, he was naturally charmed with Ethel. In the first place, he would have been charmed with any English girl who took so much interest in himself and his plans; for, like all negroes, he was frankly egotistical, and delighted to find a white lady who seemed to treat him as a superior being. But, in the second place, Ethel was really a charming, simple English village lassie, with sweet little manners and a delicious blush, who might have impressed a far less susceptible man than the young negro parson. So, whatever Ethel felt, John Creedy felt himself truly in love. And, after all, John Creedy was in all essentials an educated English gentleman, with the same chivalrous feelings towards a pretty and attractive girl that every English gentleman ought to have.

On Sunday morning Aunt Emily and Ethel went to the parish church, and the Reverend John Creedy preached the expected sermon. It was almost his first—sounded like a trial trip, Uncle James muttered,—but it was undoubtedly what connoisseurs describe as an admirable discourse. John Creedy was free from any tinge of nervousness—negroes never know what that word means,—and he spoke fervently, eloquently, and with much power of manner about the necessity for a Gold Coast Mission. Perhaps there was really nothing very original or striking in what he said, but his way of saying it was impressive and vigorous. The negro, like

many other lower races, has the faculty of speech largely developed, and John Creedy had been noted as one of the readiest and most fluent talkers at the Oxford Union debates. When he enlarged upon the need for workers, the need for help, the need for succour and sympathy in the great task of evangelisation, Aunt Emily and Ethel forgot his black hands, stretched out open-palmed towards the people, and felt only their hearts stirred within them by the eloquence and enthusiasm of that appealing gesture.

The end of it all was, that instead of a week John Creedy stopped for two months at Walton Magna, and during all that time he saw a great deal of Ethel. Before the end of the first fortnight he walked out one afternoon along the river-bank with her, and talked earnestly of his expected mission.

'Miss Berry,' he said, as they sat to rest awhile on the parapet of the little bridge by the weeping willows, 'I don't mind going to Africa, but I can't bear going all alone. I am to have a station entirely by myself up the Ancobra river, where I shall see no other Christian face from year's end to year's end. I wish I could have had some one to accompany me.'

'You will be very lonely,' Ethel answered. 'I wish indeed you could have some companionship.'

'Do you really?' John Creedy went on. 'It is not good for man to live alone; he wants a helpmate. Oh, Miss Ethel, may I venture to hope that perhaps, if I can try to deserve you, you will be mine?'

Ethel started in dismay. Mr. Creedy had been very attentive, very kind, and she had liked to hear him talk, and had encouraged his coming, but she was hardly prepared

for this. The nameless something in our blood recoiled at it. The proposal stunned her, and she said nothing but 'Oh, Mr. Creedy, how *can* you say such a thing?'

John Creedy saw the shadow on her face, the unintentional dilatation of her delicate nostrils, the faint puckering at the corner of her lips, and knew with a negro's quick instinct of face-reading what it all meant. 'Oh, Miss Ethel,' he said, with a touch of genuine bitterness in his tone, 'don't you, too, despise us. I won't ask you for any answer now; I don't want an answer. But I want you to think it over. Do think it over, and consider whether you can ever love me. I won't press the matter on you; I won't insult you by importunity; but I will tell you just this once, and once for all, what I feel. I love you, and I shall always love you, whatever you answer me now. I know it would cost you a wrench to take me, a greater wrench than to take the least and the unworthiest of your own people. But if you can only get over that first wrench, I can promise earnestly and faithfully to love you as well as ever woman yet was loved. Don't say anything now,' he went on, as he saw she was going to open her mouth again: 'wait and think it over; pray it over; and if you can't see your way straight before you when I ask you this day fortnight "Yes or No," answer me "No," and I give you my word of honour as a gentleman I will never speak to you of the matter again. But I shall carry your picture written on my heart to my grave.'

And Ethel knew that he was speaking from his very soul.

When she went home, she took Aunt Emily up into her little bedroom, over the porch where the dog-roses grew, and told her all about it. Aunt Emily cried and sobbed as if

her heart would break, but she saw only one answer from the first. 'It is a gate opened to you, my darling,' she said: 'I shall break my heart over it, Ethel, but it is a gate opened.' And though she felt that all the light would be gone out of her life if Ethel went, she worked with her might from that moment forth to induce Ethel to marry John Creedy and go to Africa. Poor soul! she acted faithfully up to her lights.

As for Uncle James, he looked at the matter very differently. 'Her instinct is against it,' he said stoutly, 'and our instincts wasn't put in our hearts for nothing. They're meant to be a guide and a light to us in these dark questions. No white girl ought to marry a black man, even if he is a parson. It ain't natural: our instinct is again it. A white man may marry a black woman if he likes: I don't say anything again him, though I don't say I'd do it myself, not for any money. But a white woman to marry a black man, why, it makes our blood rise, you know, 'specially if you've happened to have cruised worth speaking of along the Coast.'

But the vicar and the vicar's wife were charmed with the prospect of success, and spoke seriously to Ethel about it. It was a call, they thought, and Ethel oughtn't to disregard it. They had argued themselves out of those wholesome race instincts that Uncle James so rightly valued, and they were eager to argue Ethel out of them too. What could the poor girl do? Her aunt and the vicar on the one hand, and John Creedy on the other, were too much between them for her native feelings. At the end of the fortnight John Creedy asked her his simple question 'Yes or No,' and half against her will she answered 'Yes.' John Creedy took her hand

delicately in his and fervidly kissed the very tips of her fingers; something within him told him he must not kiss her lips. She started at the kiss, but she said nothing. John Creedy noticed the start, and said within himself, 'I shall so love and cherish her that I will make her love me in spite of my black skin.' For with all the faults of his negro nature, John Creedy was at heart an earnest and affectionate man after his kind.

And Ethel really did, to some extent, love him already. It was such a strange mixture of feeling. From one point of view he was a gentleman by position, a clergyman, a man of learning and of piety; and from this point of view Ethel was not only satisfied, but even proud of him. For the rest, she took him as some good Catholics take the veil—from a sense of the call. And so, before the two months were out, Ethel Berry had married John Creedy, and both started together at once for Southampton, on their way to Axim. Aunt Emily cried, and hoped they might be blessed in their new work, but Uncle James never lost his misgivings about the effect of Africa upon a born African. 'Instincts is a great thing,' he said, with a shake of his head, as he saw the West Coast mail steam slowly down Southampton Water, 'and when he gets among his own people his instincts will surely get the better of him, as safe as my name is James Berry.'

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The little mission bungalow at Butabué, a wooden shed neatly thatched with fan palms, had been built and garnished by the native catechist from Axim and his wife

before the arrival of the missionaries, so that Ethel found a habitable dwelling ready for her at the end of her long boat journey up the rapid stream of the Ancobra. There the strangely matched pair settled down quietly enough to their work of teaching and catechising, for the mission had already been started by the native evangelist, and many of the people were fairly ready to hear and accept the new religion. For the first ten or twelve months Ethel's letters home were full of praise and love for dear John. Now that she had come to know him well, she wondered she had ever feared to marry him. No husband was ever so tender, so gentle, so considerate. He nursed her in all her little ailments like a woman; she leaned on him as a wife leans on the strong arm of her husband. And then he was so clever, so wise, so learned. Her only grief was that she feared she was not and would never be good enough for him. Yet it was well for her that they were living so entirely away from all white society at Butabué, for there she had nobody with whom to contrast John but the half-clad savages around them. Judged by the light of that startling contrast, good John Creedy, with his cultivated ways and gentle manners, seemed like an Englishman indeed.

John Creedy, for his part, thought no less well of his Ethel. He was tenderly respectful to her; more distant, perhaps, than is usual between husband and wife, even in the first months of marriage, but that was due to his innate delicacy of feeling, which made him half unconsciously recognise the depth of the gulf that still divided them. He cherished her like some saintly thing, too sacred for the common world. Yet Ethel was his helper in all his work, so

cheerful under the necessary privations of their life, so ready to put up with bananas and cassava balls, so apt at kneading plantain paste, so willing to learn from the negro women all the mysteries of mixing agadey, cankey, and koko pudding. No tropical heat seemed to put her out of temper; even the horrible country fever itself she bore with such gentle resignation, John Creedy felt in his heart of hearts that he would willingly give up his life for her, and that it would be but a small sacrifice for so sweet a creature.

One day, shortly after their arrival at Butabué, John Creedy began talking in English to the catechist about the best way of setting to work to learn the native language. He had left the country when he was nine years old, he said, and had forgotten all about it. The catechist answered him quickly in a Fantee phrase. John Creedy looked amazed and started.

'What does he say?' asked Ethel.

'He says that I shall soon learn if only I listen; but the curious thing is, Ethie, that I understand him.'

'It has come back to you, John, that's all. You are so quick at languages, and now you hear it again you remember it.'

'Perhaps so,' said the missionary slowly, 'but I have never recalled a word of it for all these years. I wonder if it will all come back to me.'

'Of course it will, dear,' said Ethel; 'you know, things come to you so easily in that way. You almost learned Portuguese while we were coming out from hearing those Benguela people.'

And so it did come back, sure enough. Before John Creedy had been six weeks at Butabué, he could talk Fantee

as fluently as any of the natives around him. After all, he was nine years old when he was taken to England, and it was no great wonder that he should recollect the language he had heard in his childhood till that age. Still, he himself noticed rather uneasily that every phrase and word, down to the very heathen charms and prayers of his infancy, came back to him now with startling vividness and without an effort.

Four months after their arrival John saw one day a tall and ugly negro woman, in the scanty native dress, standing near the rude market-place, where the Butabué butchers killed and sold their reeking goat-meat. Ethel saw him start again; and with a terrible foreboding in her heart, she could not help asking him why he started. 'I can't tell you, Ethie,' he said piteously; 'for heaven's sake, don't press me. I want to spare you.' But Ethel would hear. 'Is it your mother, John?' she asked hoarsely.

'No, thank Heaven, not my mother, Ethie,' he answered her, with something like pallor on his dark cheek, 'not my mother; but I remember the woman.'

'A relative?'

'Oh, Ethie, don't press me. Yes, my mother's sister. I remember her years ago. Let us say no more about it.' And Ethel, looking at that gaunt and squalid savage woman, shuddered in her heart and said no more.

Slowly, as time went on, however, Ethel began to notice a strange shade of change coming over John's ideas and remarks about the negroes. At first he had been shocked and distressed at their heathendom and savagery; but the more he saw of it, the more he seemed to find it natural

enough in their position, and even in a sort of way to sympathise with it or apologise for it. One morning, a month or two later, he spoke to her voluntarily of his father. He had never done so in England. 'I can remember,' he said, 'he was a chief, a great chief. He had many wives, and my mother was one. He was beaten in war by Kola, and I was taken prisoner. But he had a fine palace at Kwantah, and many fan-bearers.' Ethel observed with a faint terror that he seemed to speak with pride and complacency of his father's chieftaincy. She shuddered again and wondered. Was the West African instinct getting the upper hand in him over the Christian gentleman?

When the dries were over, and the koko-harvest gathered, the negroes held a grand feast. John had preached in the open air to some of the market-people in the morning, and in the evening he was sitting in the hut with Ethel, waiting till the catechist and his wife should come in to prayers, for they carried out their accustomed ceremony decorously, even there, every night and morning. Suddenly they heard the din of savage music out of doors, and the noise of a great crowd laughing and shouting down the street. John listened, and listened with deepening attention. 'Don't you hear it, Ethie?' he cried. 'It's the tom-toms. I know what it means. It's the harvest battle-feast!'

'How hideous!' said Ethel, shrinking back.

'Don't be afraid, dearest,' John said, smiling at her. 'It means no harm. It's only the people amusing themselves.' And he began to keep time to the tom-toms rapidly with the palms of his hands.